EXTRA LIFE WRAP-UP
DRAGON+
HOLIDAY
GIFT GUIDE
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®
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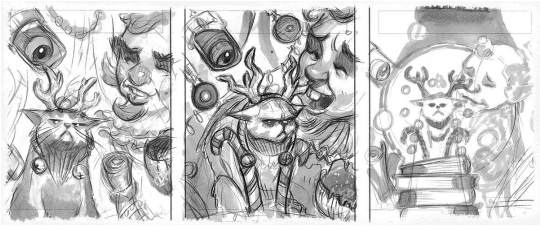
ISSUE 23

DRAGON+ 23

Welcome to Issue 23

It's the holiday season! A time of flumphs, hidden keychains, and cities filled with ooze! Wait, what?



Imagining the Ampersand

Maxx Marshall shares the creative vision behind this month's cover of *Dragon+* and reveals an artistic upbringing that includes a personal nod from Stevie Wonder.

Wrap Up

Dare you delve into the Barrier Peaks? Bart Carroll looks back at this year's Extra Life adventure and activities, with huge thanks to everyone involved!

Idle Champions on Console

Having conquered the PC and mobile gaming worlds the *Idle Champions of the Forgotten Realms* are battling their way onto consoles. Codename Entertainment's Chris Dupuis chatted with *Dragon+* to explain the leap to a new platform.

D&D Online

As Dungeons & Dragons Online approaches its 13th anniversary, James Pickard chats with Senior Product and Brand Manager **Amanda Grow** and Executive Producer **Rob Ciccolini** to pay tribute to its community and reveal the secrets of its latest expansion.

BEHIND THE SCREENS

Behind the Screen: Visual Impairment and D&D

Dragon+ spoke with those trying to make roleplaying more accessible to players with sight issues to see what more can be done to include them.

WizKids Falling Star Ship

When teenage DM Chris Perkins drew the map for a sailing ship little did he know it would one day become an amazing prop

FICTION

Fiction: Raven's Reckoning

Our tale of Braya continues as the young thief's search for Waterdeep's Vault of Dragons takes a new turn. But Braya soon discovers she's not the only one in the hunt for Waterdeep's Vault of Dragons. As everyone else continues their own search...

worthy of tabletop adventures. *Dragon+* sets sail on *The Falling Star* with its creative team.

D&D Toons: City Under Ooze

Our cartoon walkthrough tours a city with an ooze problem. Plus, our latest round of doodles!

Streaming Highlights

This issue we highlight Spanish language gaming and a livestream game based on a shiny platinum box set. Excelente!

Dungeon Mayhem

Dungeon Mayhem is the fast-paced card game of feuding

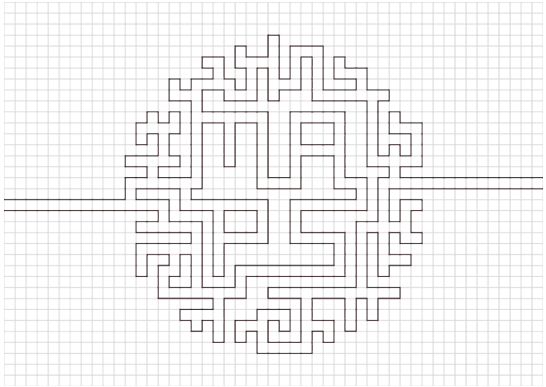
Dragon Classic

This issue we look back at sailing ships and dangerous

D&D heroes. David Axbey sat down with designers Jordan Comar and Roscoe Wetlaufer to find out more.

The Best of the DMs Guild

’Tis the season to challenge and delight players in new and festive ways as DMs Guild Adept Shawn Merwin looks at holiday content for your D&D game.



Maps of the Month

This issue we feature crashed ships, sailing vessels, and peek down into the most massive dungeon of them all!

Unearthed Arcana: Of Ships and the Sea

It’s nautical but nice this month as we discuss ships, officers, dungeons. Oh—and more holiday goodness!

Next Issue: Dragon+ 24

Join our stream of consciousness in the next exciting edition of *Dragon+*!

crew, and the hazards of the high seas.

DRAGON+ 23

Welcome to Issue 23

It's the holiday season! A time of flumphs, hidden keychains, and cities filled with ooze! Wait, what?

Ever go into a souvenir shop as a kid and come across one of those spinner racks of personalized license plates? How often did you find one with your name on it? Odds were pretty good if you were an Amy, Christopher, Jason, Jennifer, Melissa or Michael (the most popular names during the decade I was born).

Not so good if you're a Bart.

Apparently the 496th most popular name in my birth year—having since dropped considerably to 15,927th—there were never many "Bart" souvenirs (and I'm sure Elminster and Drizzt, poking through the Realms' version of a souvenir shop, have the same trouble…). Such is the lament of having an odd family name but I don't think the ancestors were considering such implications back when the Bartletts married into the O'Carrolls.

Growing up there weren't many Barts in fiction and media, either (at least until *The Simpsons* came around). That is, with one memorable exception from my childhood:

I loved Dr. Seuss, and still do. I love the wordplay bantered around the vibrant worlds he created. Even better, he penned two books that held great interest for me—I'm speaking of course of *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, and *Bartholomew and the Ooblek*. If you're not familiar with the latter, a haughty king orders his court magicians to summon a new kind of weather—which turns out to be ooblek, a rain of sticky slime that ends up covering everything and everyone,

very nearly drowning the Kingdom of Didd (until King Derwin finally repents at the suggestion of his young page boy Bartholomew, and apologizes).

This story stayed with me, especially the imagery of the ooblek overtaking the kingdom. Decades later it would factor into the special adventure created for this year's D&D Extra Life: *The Lost Laboratory of Kwalish*. In it, adventurers come upon a city buried beneath a vast gelatinous cube….

This issue, look for continuing fiction from Mark Price and David Roomes, a deep dive into *Dungeon Mayhem,* and of course in this holiday season plenty of suggested gifts for gamers—which are more bountiful than ever (and far easier to find than the aforementioned license plates). We'll also explore Extra Life and its adventure much further, but for now I would like to sincerely thank everyone who took part, whether as a DM or player in your own Extra Life activities, a donor to any of the participants, a viewer of any of the livestreamed games, a purchaser of our adventure or any of our apparel, or in any other capacity. We've said it multiple times, and we'll keep saying it because it's very true—your help goes to a truly great cause, Children's Miracle Network Hospitals, and is vastly appreciated!

As part of Extra Life, several participants offered their character details, including naming rights, as donation rewards. That's how last year I ended up with a Firbolg named Fee of Wug, and this year my character received a flumph companion named Flumphernutter. Before I sign off for this last issue of 2018, an added note to a few of my own donors, which include Forrest G. Emerson, Mick Chambers, Ben Carver, Matthew Maranda, Bob Nelson, Rory Philstrom, Fred Kluth, Jennifer Roth, Shelly Mazzanoble, Emi Tanji, and *Dragon+* EIC Matt Chapman—thank you all!

Bart Carroll, Digital Marketing Manager

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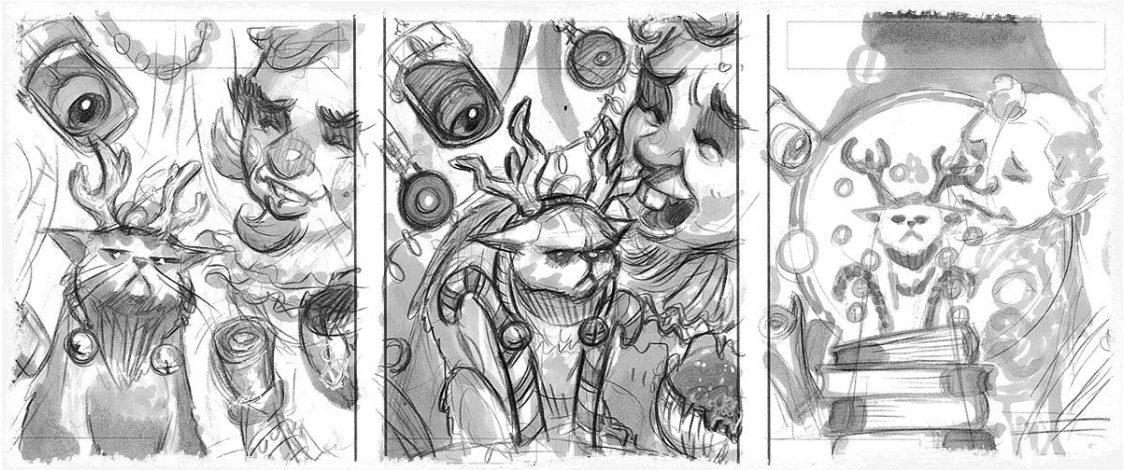


Imagining the Ampersand

Maxx Marshall shares the creative vision behind this month's cover of *Dragon+* and reveals an artistic upbringing that includes a personal nod from Stevie Wonder.

Illustrator Maxx Marshall first cut his teeth at video games company Blizzard, but he began creating fun and crazy characters long before he started working on its games. His love of computers and coding shone through at an early age, and the skills he honed led the gaming company to ask him to join the team.

"I got a newspaper delivery job when I was 11 and used the money to buy my first computer, which was a Commodore Amiga. I started programming and creating art on it, and at the beginning of college Blizzard contacted me and asked me to be a concept artist," he tells *Dragon+* from his home in Bellevue, Washington.

Maxx Marshall

Marshall worked on *Diablo*, *World of Warcraft*, and *StarCraft*, and if you've played that third one and encountered the Zerg, you'll

know his work.

"When I first got to Blizzard they were looking for new, weird, creepy designs and that's what I love doing. I was creating a high-school football team and the Hydralysk was the quarterback. If you look at that character you can see he has all the things a quarterback has, like shoulder plates. I also gave him an upside-down 'M' on his head for Maxx," he recalls.

"I took it into the art directors' office, and they said, 'This is the guy. This is the first Zerg.' From there I used the same iconic shapes and textures, and that's how the Zerg came about. I also animated them and made them in 3D."

Marshall transferred to the UK to become the assistant art director on *Little Big Planet 3* and also worked on an official *Doctor Who* game for the BBC. It was when he started working at Wizards of the Coast on *Magic: The Gathering Arena* that he realized the D&D team was downstairs. Having worked on a couple of Dungeons & Dragons books while also at Blizzard, he was able to cross over once more with his childhood passion.

"I kept going downstairs to stare at them and talked to them every so often. After a while I was asked if I wanted to help out with a couple of things, and I'm such a fan of D&D that of course I said yes," he remembers.

"I helped them with this year's **Extra Life charity adventure** , designing the characters of the Cartophile and Mary. They said, 'Everybody's really happy with the art. Do you want to put a bow on top of this endeavor and make a cover for the magazine?" And I said, 'Oh my goodness yes. Yes, yes, yes!'"

Character: Cartophile (Select to view)

How do you describe your

artistic style?

A little bit of anime, a little bit of illustrator, and a lot of comics. I like classic illustration. When I was younger, my comics were all *X-Men* and I was big into anything with mutants or scary situations with kids. Currently I'm looking at Japanese, American, French and English art books. I also read a lot of *Hellboy* these days and that's beautiful.

Your mother was a draftswoman, so does an artistic streak run in the family?

A lot of members of my family are creative. My dad's a Motown producer and arranger, and if you've ever heard the song ' *My Cherie Amour*' that's Stevie Wonder singing a song about my stepmom while she was with my dad! I liked computers more than most of the people in my family and I began working art into my daily routine of being a computer programmer when I was a kid.

Character Creation process: Mary

What’s your artistic process like?

It begins with a lot of sketching. I'll disappear somewhere and start drawing. If I'm figuring out what a character does or is, I will imagine that character walking around my house and try to figure out what things clash with it and what things look good with the character. Then it's more doodling and sketching to figure out the feel of the piece.

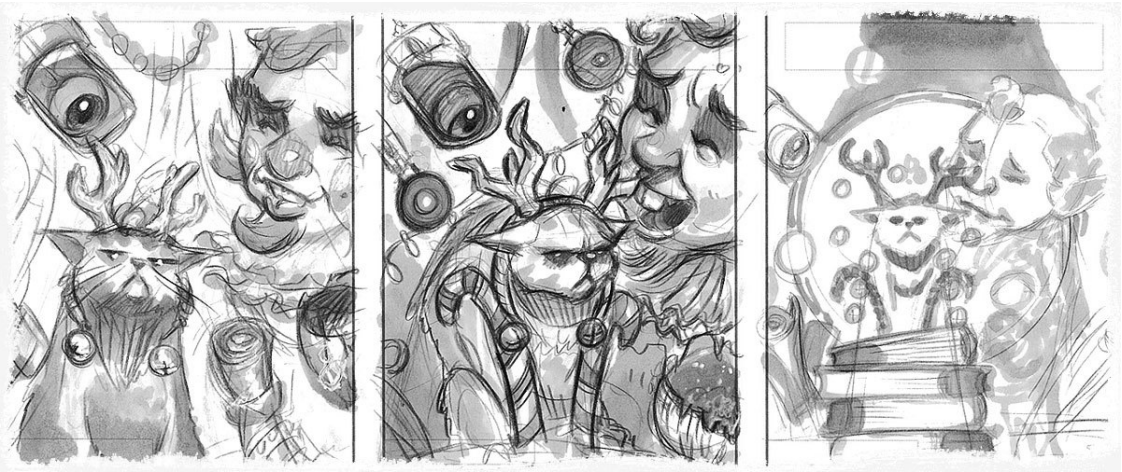
I usually start with pencils and once I've made sure everyone is happy with the final draft I move into inks. Then I scan the image and bring everything into Photoshop or Procreate to start coloring.

Tell us about this issue's cover image because there's a lot going on…

[Laughs] My thought was that Mary and the rest of the characters from the Extra Life adventure hang out with the Cartophile. Mary has a cat—as do I—and I think the final idea came from my daughters continually putting hats on our cat. We have the most patient and loving cat, otherwise my daughters would have been scratched and that hasn't happened. But watching this cat quietly allow them to do

this was so silly and so much fun.

I started with both the Cartophile and the cat on the cover, having the Cartophile put a bunch of things on the cat. We pulled the Cartophile out of the shot because the cat's sadness and demeanour was just so hilarious [And if you read through the adventure and learn Mary's secret, the cat's demeanor is that much more hilarious—Ed].



What else can we see in the image?

Mary has a bunch of odd things floating off her dress, so I wanted to make sure those were represented in the picture. The background is the Cartophile's office stuffed with weird books and things a mapmaker would have. You've got maps and seals all over the place and books he's flipping through to read the stories and figure out where things are geographically.

Was it always going to be an animated gif?

At some point we wondered if we should put a happy, glowing nose on the cat. After I brought the image into Photoshop I animated the nose to blink on and off. A lot of people saw the gif and said, 'If we can make this work on the cover, we have to do it!'

How early did you begin playing D&D?

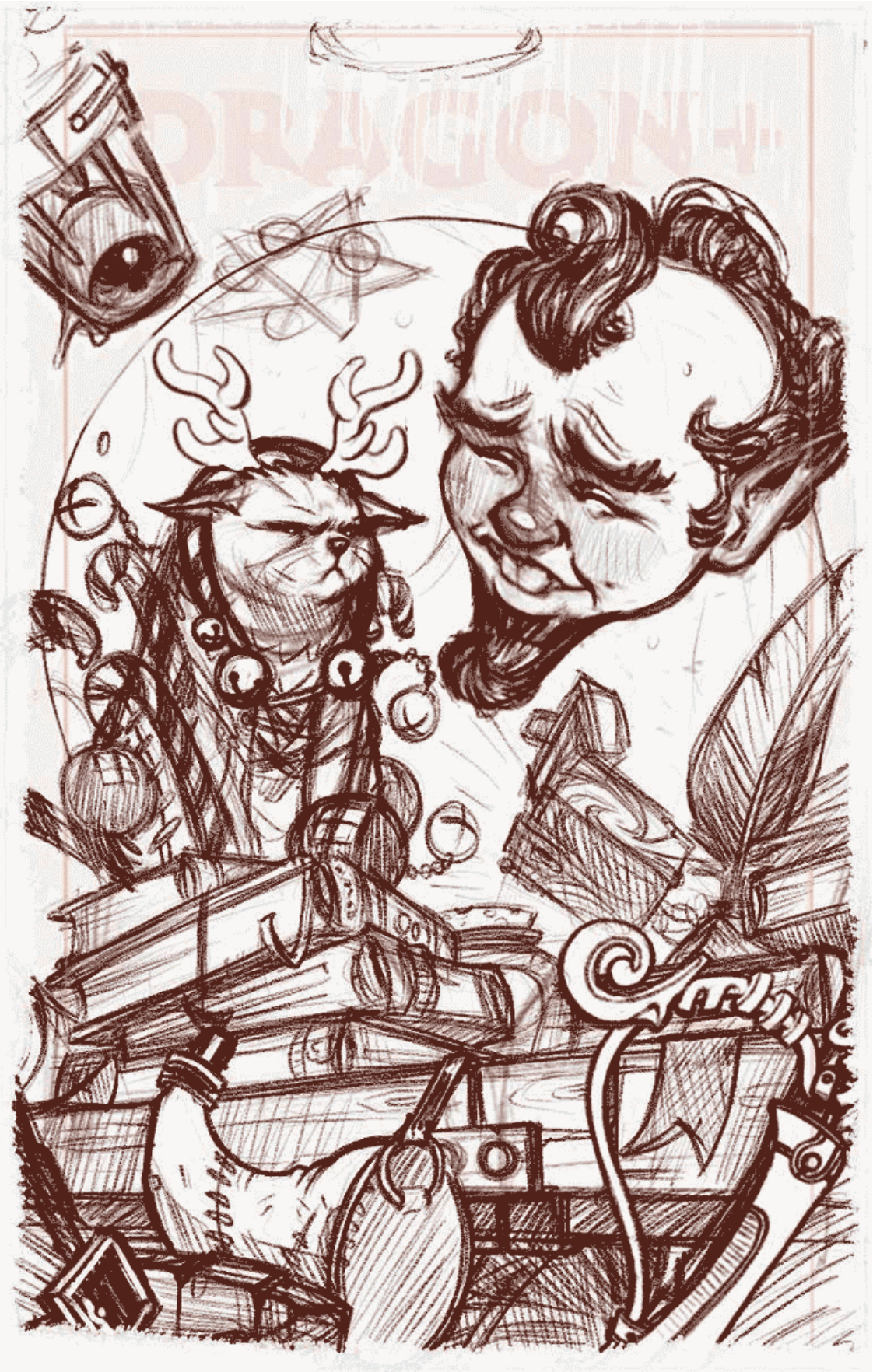
It has made me super happy to have even touched a small part of Dungeons & Dragons because I've played it since I was a small kid in Detroit, from a very, very young age. My friends' parents would play in downtown Detroit in random places. I started really getting into creating characters and drawing them, figuring out the weird accoutrements they could have. Then my brothers started to play after they saw my passion when I would talk about all the great adventures we were going on. That's when it really took off and we became a

household of D&D players.

I always play rogues. Even in videogames today I take the stealth route. I'm quiet, I hide in shadows and then I burst out and backstab. Rogues are the best.

Have you ever been a Dungeon Master?

I have but I get so far into the visuals that I get frustrated with my players if they don't go and see the things I make. I will sit down and create a bar or the upstairs of the pub, as well as all of these creatures that inhabit these areas and their little narratives. What's frustrating is when my brothers and my friends would enter the pub, find the main person and then say, 'I guess we can leave now'.



It’s the curse of the DM. You can lay all the breadcrumbs you want but they always see something shiny in the other direction…

They see the shiny thing and go towards it, and I weep!

Do you still play in a regular game?
I'm starting a new game very soon with a group that includes one of my brothers. It's nice to join a brand spanking new game and I'll be randomly drawing all of the characters. I might create a poster because I love figuring out what everyone looks like and what the world feels like. That's what makes me happy.

We look forward to seeing some of those characters on social media…
Definitely.

You can find more of Maxx Marshall's work on his official website and connect with him on Twitter , Tumblr , and Instagram.

BACK TO TOP

Holiday Gift Guide

Give the gift of awesome with our indispensable guide to some of the best RPG holiday presents.

The holiday season is upon us once more so let the gift giving commence! Whether you're looking for an amazing gift for your Dungeon Master or fellow roleplayers (or need to drop the right hints to avoid being on the receiving end of a novelty tie *again*), we've got you covered. Follow our recommendations for the RPG enthusiasts in your life and it'll be holiday smiles all round.

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

Waterdeep: Dragon Heist, Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage and Waterdeep: Dragon Heist dice

Two brilliant new fifth edition Dungeons & Dragons books offer enough gaming to see you through the holiday period and far into 2019. *Dragon Heist* pits adventurers against Waterdeep's infamous crime lords in a race to an enormous horde of gold, before the party heads deep below the City of Splendors for a vacation including all-you-can-eat buffets and drinks with little umbrellas in them. At least that's the restful experience we assume you can expect in the *Dungeon of the Mad Mage*—so far no-one's returned to say otherwise…

(Select to view)

Whether you're planning your next caper or simply spending a night on the town in Waterdeep, players and DMs can also get their hands on a new set of dice to roll their way into—and hopefully out of—trouble.

(Select to view)

MSRP: $24.95 (*Waterdeep: Dragon Heist dice*); $44.95 (*Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*); $44.95 (*Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*)

BOX CLEVER

Beadle & Grimm's Platinum Edition of Waterdeep: Dragon Heist

It may not have a melting point of 3,215°F (1,768°C) like its namesake metal but boy this special edition box set of *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* is hot! Created by D&D superfan and actor Matthew Lillard and his friends, *Dragon+* asked *him* to pick out his favorite item from among the collection of premium goodies within:

"Very early on in *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* the players have the opportunity to win the deed to a tavern called Trollskull Manor. Most of our materials are built so the DM can provide the players with a heightened experience but the one element we created simply for the

players is a collapsible metal shot cup. This has the Trollskull Manor logo on it and I love it because it's super kitschy and fun. It's that above and beyond in-world element we wanted to include in our Platinum Edition box set to really wow the players."

(Select to view)

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MSRP: $499.00

FIFTH DIMENSION

D&D Fifth Edition Core Rules Gift Set

Need a refresh on your well-worn copies? Have a friend who is itching to get into the game? Want a super-handy case to hold all that D&D goodness? The Dungeons & Dragons Core Rules Gift Set includes a Dungeon Master's Screen and everything you need to play the world's greatest roleplaying game.

(Select to view)

It also comes in a limited edition format exclusive to hobby stores, featuring alternative-art covers beautifully illustrated by Hydro74. Use our handy store locator to find a hobby store near you.

MSRP: $169.95

SPREAD THE WORD

For Fans By Fans D&D gear
Whether you're pulling your wallet out at the checkout, adorning your head with a trucker's or dad-style cap or alerting people to what that grin really means, you'll find a huge range of fan-created goodies to proudly display your love of Dungeons & Dragons. Even better, use code PLUS25 and you'll get 25% off For Fans By Fans D&D merchandise until December 31, 2018.

MSRP: $17.00 (Ampersand wallet); $25.00 (Trucker hat); $25.00 (

Ampersand dad cap); $25.00 (Beware of the smiling DM T-shirt: women's; men's).

MAGICAL MOMENTS

D&D Icons of the Realms: Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica figures

When the worlds of *Magic: The Gathering* and Dungeons & Dragons cross over, as they have again recently with the excellent *Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica* sourcebook, there's mana in the air. That magical energy only increases in-game with the introduction of D&D Icons of the Realms figures. From random boosters containing four figures each, and starter sets of companions, to the premium Niv-Mizzet Red Dragon figure, they bring the characters from this world impressively to life.

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MSRP: $15.99 to $127.92

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

Dungeons and Dragons Art and Arcana: A Visual History
When authors Kyle Newman, Jon Peterson and Michael and Sam Witwer came together to sift through the artistic legacy of D&D and create a love letter to the game they adore, the result was a work of art in its own right. "We didn't only want it to be art with a minimum amount of words," Newman says. "We wanted to actually look at the importance of the art involved. And we wanted to include an ephemera of products, animation, and curios from the history of the game. That's why we came together with different perspectives, different histories of the game, and different skill sets." A boxed *Special Edition* containing the book and other collectable ephemera is also available.

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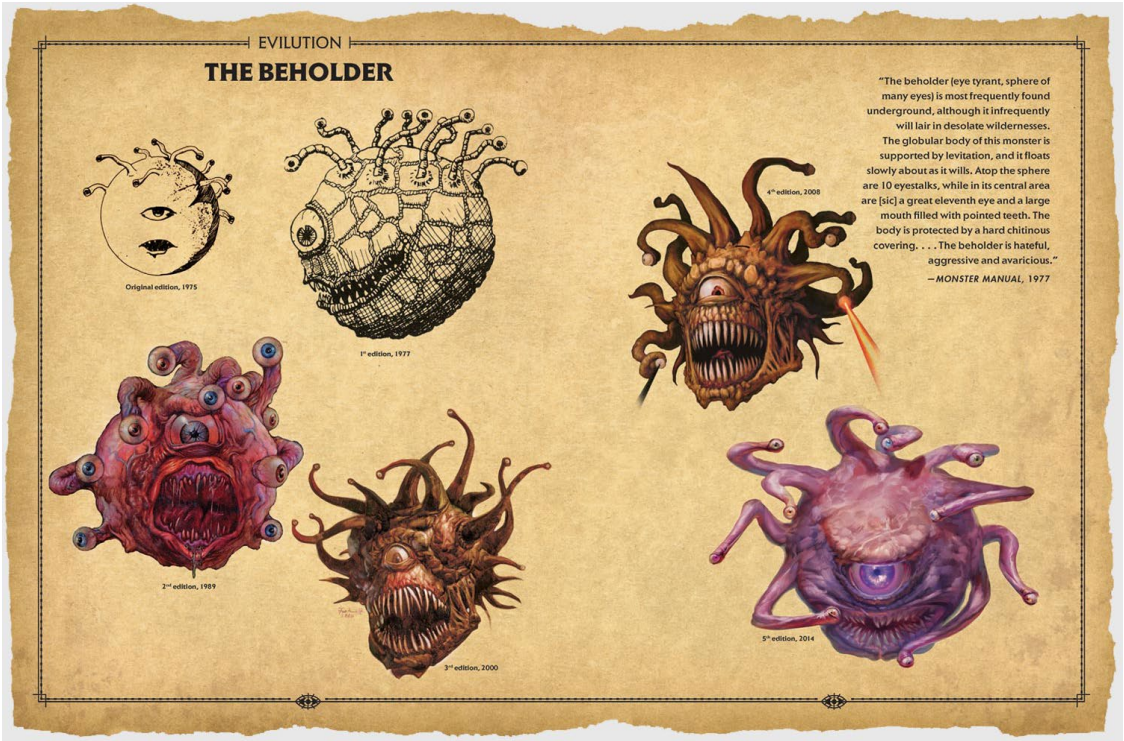

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MSRP: $50.00 (Standard edition); $125.00 (Boxed special edition)

DRESSED TO KILL

Death Saves clothing

"Fantasy artwork is what inspired me to be creative as a kid. Long before I started acting or producing I would draw and create characters, writing backstories for them all. A lot of them were monsters, particularly as I loved Universal Monsters like Dracula, Frankenstein and the Wolfman, Ralph Bakshi's *Hobbit* cartoon and all those Godzilla movies," says Joe Manganiello when *Dragon+* asks what inspired his range of clothing.

(Select to view)

"Death Saves is my way of building up this art gallery using the kind of work I saw when I was a kid. I wanted to pass on that heavy metal fantasy look to the next generation."

Manganiello's range currently includes everything from T-shirts and long-sleeved tops to patches, phone cases and pins. And it's only going to increase.

"We have a whole bunch of new artwork coming in for Death Saves that we're discussing with our design team," he reveals.

MSRP: $15.00 (Beholder pin); $35.00 (Paladin in Hell Redux iPhone or Samsung case); $35.00 (Death Saves Rules T-shirt);

$42.00 (Death Knight Betrayer long sleeve top); $3,200.00 (Death Knight Ring, gold)

DRESSED TO IMPRESS

Han Cholo jewelry

What's cooler than a name which sounds like a certain roguish smuggler from a galaxy far, far away? The incredible jewelry created by this L.A. company! There's even a retro pin featuring the Yoda-like figure of Dungeon Master from the 1983 cartoon to cement that *Star Wars* link.

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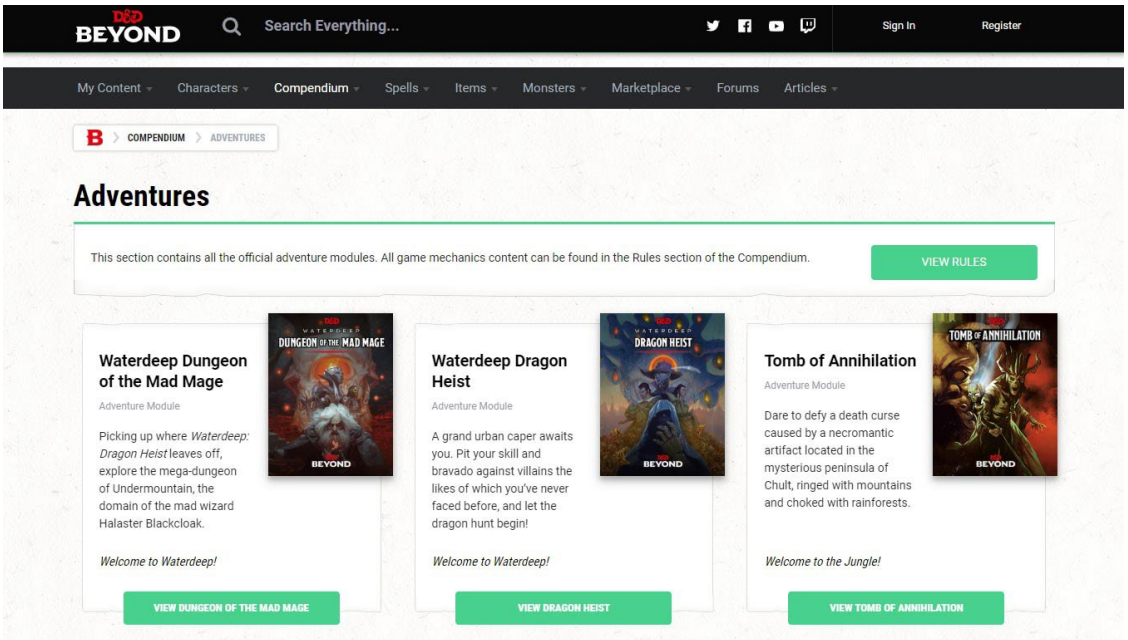
MSRP: $12.00 (Dungeon Master character enamel pin); $25.00 (20-sided dice earrings); $40.00 (Nine lives stealer cuff); $85.00 (Beholder stud earring); $200.00 (Twin dragon ring); $300.00 (Mimic pendant)

ONE STEP BEYOND

D&D Beyond

Dungeons & Dragons has brought players together all over the world for over 40 years. Companion app D&D Beyond now enhances game management to eliminate the need to manually search through books and make that time at the table even more enjoyable, while also taking a load off players through features such as the character builder.

The Hero Tier is intended primarily for players and removes ads, allows the creation of an unlimited number of characters, and adds publicly-shared homebrew content to your collection to use within the toolset. Meanwhile, the Master Tier is intended for use by Dungeon Masters and player groups, including all the benefits that come with the Hero tier and adding the ability to share unlocked official content with other players in your campaigns. Time to get digital!



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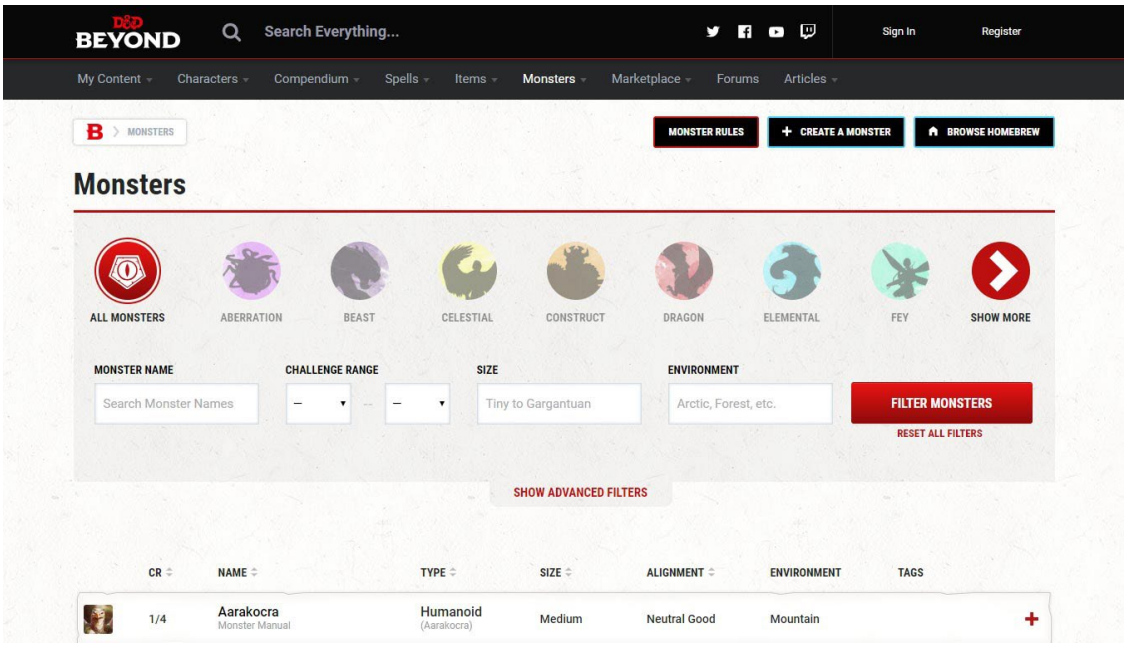

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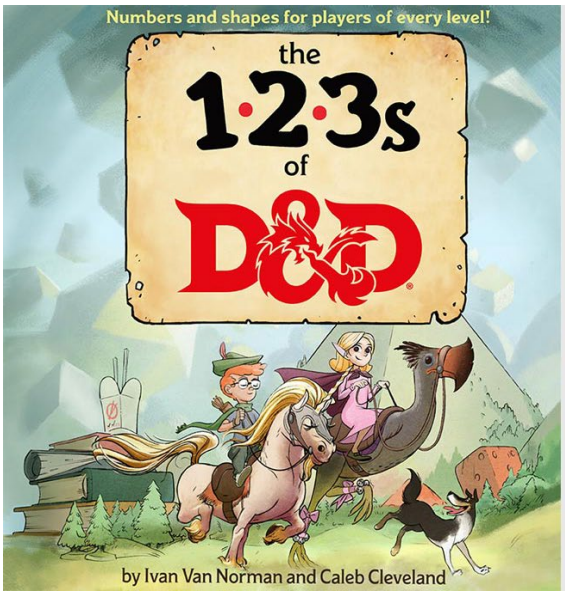
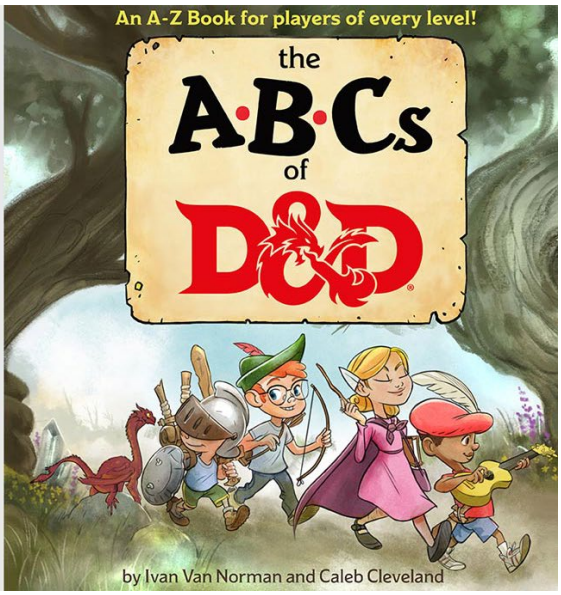
Subscriptions: $2.99 monthly, $14.99 biannually or $25.99 annually (Hero Tier); $5.99 monthly, $29.99 biannually or $54.99 annually (Master Tier)

LEARN YOUR LESSON

The ABCs and 123s of D&D

If you're looking for great gifts for younger gamers then author Ivan Van Norman and artist Caleb Cleveland have just the thing. Following up on their previous collaboration *The ABCs of RPGs,* they're back with two equally bright and wonderful primers! Kids can use the *123s* and *ABCs of D&D* to learn their numbers and letters, featuring read-aloud-friendly rhyming couplets from Ivan and adorable illustrations from Caleb.





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MSRP: $14.99 (*The ABCs of D&D*); $14.99 (*The 123s of D&D*)

SOUNDS OF THE CITY

Syrinscape Waterdeep: Dragon Heist soundtrack
"Syrinscape is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year and it's truly an honor to launch the first official sounds of the legendary Dungeons & Dragons roleplaying game," says Benjamin Loomes, Syrinscape CEO and Creative Director. "The Dungeons & Dragons RPG settings, creatures and characters are as beloved as the game itself and, as a player since the 'Red Box' starter set days, it's particularly thrilling for me to create the sounds that will bring them to life."

(Select to view)

The SoundPack also captures the intrigue of the City of Splendors through its characters, using dialog from the adventure spoken by talented voice actors. The notorious Volo is voiced by Chris Perkins, the noble Renaer by Mike Mearls, while Satine Phoenix voices a Gazer.

In addition to the dialog, players can experience a rollicking evening in Waterdeep's notorious watering hole, the Yawning Portal, a thunderous troll attack, a fully interactive Durnan the barkeep to buy drinks from or probe for information, as well as Waterdeep in all four seasons.

MSRP: $10.99

BETRAYED AGAIN!

Betrayal at House on the Hill Upgrade Kit
Upgrade Your Copy of *Betrayal at House on the Hill* with this premium kit! It includes six pre-assembled and double-sided character cards which introduce new art and use dials sandwiched between the two sides to accurately track each character's Speed, Might, Sanity, and Knowledge. The set also contains eight premium pearlescent green dice featuring custom pips, but remember you'll already need the *Betrayal at House on the Hill* base game to play.

MSRP: $14.99

FREE PLAY

Neverwinter MMORPG

You can't beat the price of free-to-play, especially for a video game as lovingly crafted and as frequently updated as *Neverwinter*. Players can explore the same worlds as the tabletop roleplaying game, including Ravenloft, the Lost City of Omu, and the Tomb of Annihilation, while also becoming an intern in legendary adventuring conglomerate Acquisitions Incorporated!

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And if you do fancy making a purchase—for yourself or as a gift to aid a friend—Starter Packs have what you need. The basic Starter Pack contains an Adventurer's Helper Pack, an *Amulet of Protection* and a *Bag of Holding*, while the Feywild Starter Pack offers a Portal Hound, a Feywild Hunter's Ring, an Embroidered Elven Silk Bag and an Adventurer's Helper Pack as you prepare for the inevitable battle against Malabog and his armies.

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MSRP: $0.00 (Neverwinter), $19.99 (Starter Pack); $19.99 (Feywild Starter Pack)

GAME ON

Dungeon Mayhem
If time is truly of the essence, you'll be thrilled to hear that *Dungeon Mayhem* distills the fun of D&D into a quick-fire frenzy of thievery, spells, healing, and very big swords. The card game was created by Jordan Comar and Roscoe Wetlaufer (hear more from them later in this issue) and includes input from Mike Mearls, who named and created backstories for the four brave, quirky characters (barbarian Sutha the Skullcrusher, wizard Azzan the Mystic, paladin Lia the Radiant, and rogue Oriax the Clever, all illustrated by Kyle Ferrin).

WATCH TWITCH VIDEO

BOSS BATTLES

Vault of Dragons board game

"What made this such an exciting thing to create is that D&D is being talked about in a new way these days," says John-Paul Brisigotti, the CEO of Gale Force Nine. "Gaming has become a more social, casual experience, and the enemy is always time."

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The *Vault of Dragons* board game fights that foe by putting a whole new spin on *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*, pitting players against the city's criminal elements in a 90-minute rush to find a hidden stash of gold. Brisigotti, a veteran player who has been rolling dice and moving figures around boards since the '80s, admits he wanted to make the game because it was "cool": "I'm blessed by the fact that I'm a gamer who owns a gaming company. Some things you just

have to make because they're cool."

MSRP: $50.00

BAG OF HOLDING

For Fans By Fans Dragon's Hoard Dice Bag
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Wrap Up

Dare you delve into the Barrier Peaks? Bart Carroll looks back at this year's Extra Life adventure and activities, with huge thanks to everyone involved!

What is Extra Life?

Extra Life is the charitable organization Wizards of the Coast/D&D has been happy to be involved with since 2013, with gamers around the world meeting and live-streaming with the purpose of driving donations to their local Children's Miracle Network Hospital.

How did Wizards of the Coast first get involved?

Greg Bilsland put together the first Wizards/D&D Extra Life team and that tradition was carried on by Chris Dupuis (currently with Codename Entertainment, and who talks with us elsewhere this issue). I've taken over those duties for the past couple of years. *Magic: the Gathering* started its own team in 2015 and we've since

been operating together as a Wizards of the Coast Super Team!

How does the D&D team participate?

In years past we've run 24- and even 48-hour tabletop live-stream marathons on Twitch.com/dnd. This year we looked to extend things a little further throughout the year. Starting back in July, we live-streamed Luke Gygax's inaugural Founders & Legends Day in support of the charity. Then during the official Extra Life Game Day (November 3), we ran another series of games here at Wizards, followed by streamers on the D&D Twitch channel donating their sessions that week to the cause. All of which culminated at Gamehole Con in Madison WI (November 9-11), with events there supporting Extra Life—including games streamed on the D&D Beyond channel featuring Maze Arcana, the Saving Throw Show, Stefan Pokorny of *Dwarven Forge*, the Adventurers League Admins, Mike Mearls, and Chris Perkins (the latter running parts of this year's adventure, *Lost Laboratory of Kwalish*).

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Participants helped fundraise along the way by allowing donors to help craft their characters or adventures. Pick their class, pick their backgrounds, you name it and it was up for grabs with the right donation. *Clerical Error* DM Lauren Urban even allowed donors to submit random events to take place during the game (and I was thrilled to see one of my own drawn, involving the dangerous Tito Dragon swooping down to steal a character's hair).

Donations made to my own Extra Life page saw me wearing a

Movember mustache during my game, eating candy corn (which I despise) every time I rolled a critical fail, and even scheduling interviews to take place in later issues of *Dragon+*!

How has this year's fundraising compared with previous years?
This has been our sixth year participating and I'm beyond proud of everyone's efforts to be able to say 2018 has been our best fundraising year to date.

I'd also like to call out a few individuals on the team—D&D's Senior Brand Director Nathan Stewart raised over $20k on his own, and Creative Director Mike Mearls damn near the same. Plus Greg Marks, Chris Lindsay, Travis Woodall, Lysa Chen, Alan Patrick, and Bill Benham all helped work within the Adventurers League to each raise a tremendous amount of donations. D4 DnD also set a goal of raising $500 during their own stream—and managed to raise over $5k!

D&D created a special adventure for Extra Life. How did that come about?
Last year we released The Tortle Package on the DMs Guild—offering a playable race of anthropomorphic turtle-folk, based on the results of a Twitter feud (of sorts) between Mike Mearls and Jeremy Crawford. Inspired by its success Chris Lindsay helped give all Wizards of the Coast employees the ability to create material for the DMs Guild provided all proceeds went towards Extra Life.

Inspired by *that* opportunity I helped create an adventure: *Lost Laboratory of Kwalish*.

LEARN MORE

And for anyone picking up a copy I wanted to offer the following inside scoop on its creation:

Initial Design: Where to Travel in the Barrier Peaks

I previously spoke about this with Timothy Connelly but I grew up loving mash-ups (whether I realized what they were or not).

Especially *Star Wars: Episode IV* with its sci-fi world explored by a wizard and his young peasant squire armed with magic swords. So when it came time to create an Extra Life adventure, *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*—already the quintessential D&D/sci-fi mash-up—became my starting point.

While I wanted to play within that particular sandbox I didn't want to recreate the original adventure so much as offer an alternative take on a crashed spaceship. I also knew that I wanted to try and offer as much value as I could for anyone willing to purchase the adventure. That meant multiple options, items, monsters… and locations.

The crashed ship had to remain a key location in the peaks. But in this version it became a planar ship tied to the famed inventor, Kwalish. For a second location I turned back to an old pitch I'd made years before to the Wizards of the Coast Novels Dept. That idea of a city buried under ooze lost out but I filed the concept away for future use and finally brought it into this adventure as Daoine Gloine.

So *Lost Laboratory of Kwalish*'s version of the Barrier Peaks hosts both a "Badass Monastery" as well as an "Evil Shangri-La"… ah, hmm… both of which appear in EOTBeholder's The Only Fantasy World Map You'll Ever Need (residing within the Mountains of Madness). Damn, it would seem I'm not nearly as clever as I thought…

Further Confessions on Adventure Design

In this issue's Welcome Letter I spoke about Dr. Seuss' *Bartholomew and the Ooblek*, read and reread to my son far too many times, as influencing Daoine Gloine's plague of ooze. But there were many other sources pilfered from, so in the interest in coming clean here goes:

Daoine Gloine's name itself came from running Google Translate searches back and forth in Irish to help generate fantasy-sounding monikers such as Daoine Gloine (people of glass), as well as Lean Meimbaol (from "Lean mé i mbaol", or follow me to danger), and Gloine Nathair-Nathair (from Gloine Nathair for "glass serpent")—all probably nonsensical in Irish, but which led to a lovely Twitter conversation afterwards with a teacher at one of Ireland's Irish language schools.

The Monastery of the Distressed Body's overall mood was partially influenced from *Aliens 3*, its monks' force pikes from the Slayers in 1983's *Krull* (another sci-fi/fantasy mash-up from my youth), and the floating monastery itself from the spaceship in Filmation's *Jason of Star Command*. Ctenmiir in his coffin took inspiration from Hannibal Lector wheeled around on his gurney; Garret and Gearbox's interactions riffed on *Lost in Space*'s Dr. Smith and the Robot; and Kwalish trapped in armor revisited the final image of 1979's *The Black Hole*, with Dr. Reinhardt merged with Maximilian.

Apparatus of Kwalish (Select to view)

As always, *Ioun stones*, golems, brains in a jar, and *decks of many things* are awesome components and I was glad to include them in an adventure, as well as the *apparatus of Kwalish* itself which I was privileged to also design into a *Betrayal at Baldur's Gate* haunt (Hail Olhydra!).

Surviving a Punch to the Face

Now came the scary part. After initial design and playthrough it was time to present my efforts to other people and for this I sought out some of the best critics I could find. A huge deal of notes, corrections, and material came from several of the Guild Adepts.

Scott Fitzgerald Gray took on the tasks of editing and formatting, as well as adding further design of his own. And after months of iteration, it came time to invite members of the public to help playtest.

As it invariably turned out, a great deal still needed to be revised and elaborated. I remain extremely grateful to all of the playtest groups who agreed to take part, and their notes, suggestions, and customizations were simply fantastic to read!

Among the more consistent feedback was a high chance of a TPK in the monastery (resulting in further options to capture rather than kill characters, as well as a sidebar on scaling down the adventure) and some disappointment about finding the *powered armor* only at the end (which adds to the messaging about going back afterward with it to help clear out the monastery). Many groups also had a lot of fun with the concept of a "reverse sphinx" demanding a riddle from the players, which you can see played out at Chris Perkins' Gamehole game:

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WATCH ON TWITCH

The NPCs were also met with a good reception. Mario Ortegón (from the elwarius livestream) chose to replace Mary Graymalkin's cat with a vulture familiar for effect, and reported that his players drew heavily from her *deck of several things* (a modified *deck of many things*). As he wrote:

"I opted for some of the effects to be delayed for some climactic moments during the adventure. For example, the character who drew the Donjon card wasn't transported to the prison until they set foot in the monastery. The Knight card came into play when the party needed to make an escape from the monastery. The Skull card manifested in the undead medusa, and the party had to find clever ways to win the battle with only one of them actively fighting it. The only things that I had happen instantly were boons and banes (gaining proficiencies, magic items, and spells, or losing them).

"I feel this 'delayed' approach helped the game a lot more than having chaos explode at once/every hour before they set out on the adventure."

Charles Goren's group also enjoyed Ctenmiir (the vampire pulled over from *White Plume Mountain*): "Since he was not really able to directly influence them too much, I used him mainly as comedic relief with his answer to almost every question being, 'Oh the only way to solve that problem is to let me out of the coffin to deal with it personally.'

"It would be nice if there was some way that they could interact with Ctenmiir a little bit more directly, a way to give him some reward that he would value short of complete freedom to destroy and Kill Them All. Maybe they could have one of those systems like a bank teller, where they are behind a plexiglass wall with a tiny drawer in it, so you can put things in the box and then the box locks and the other side opens. So the characters can let the vampire receive small rewards like a little vial of blood."

When it came to Ctenmiir, I was also totally floored when one of the groups—Dustin Fletcher and Devan Henderson (of D4 DnD)—crafted a miniature of the vampire's golem-legged coffin. I was glad to include its image in the adventure, and also see their custom maps and terrain in action during their Extra Life Game Day stream.

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Various groups also suggested or employed such modifications as adding “a few weird science traps and skill challenges” to access the clockwork kraken’s engine (from Mario), or having the monastery’s brains work in a hivemind fashion (from Mick Chambers of the Kansas City Area Dungeons & Dragons Club).

Those Wonderful Toys…

Among the positive feedback coming back from playtesters was the inclusion of a sci-fi trinket table, courtesy of Will Doyle. Added to the fun of adventurers trying to figure out how these trinkets work within the context of the adventure, there’s also the players themselves trying to match them to their real-world equivalents.

And when it comes to the ultimate technological fun, Jeremy Crawford used multiple sessions of the *Dragon+* livestream to tear into my concept for a new version of the famed *powered armor* (after all, we couldn’t explore the Barrier Peaks without including this item!). Take a look at the heavily annotated original, and enjoy the video archives of our discussions:

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Additional Rumors

In previous community polls we have asked for your thoughts on elemental trinkets, things carried in a giant's bag, and unusual lich phylacteries—reporting your answers here in the pages of *Dragon+*. Several months back, we asked for your rumors regarding the famed Barrier Peaks. Whether true or not, what strange stories circulate around the local taverns about the peaks?

As always, you came through with some truly fantastic ideas! We were pleased to include many of our favorites in the adventure itself (and made sure to acknowledge the individual contributors in the credits); and by way of an adventure preview, here now is the expanded Barrier Peaks rumor table:

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A Final Word of Thanks

Laurence Withey (Select to view)

Along with the rest of our Extra Life efforts, a great many people came together to lend a hand in various ways. For *Lost Laboratory of Kwalish* this very much includes the art, cartography, and cartoon (which we've shown elsewhere this issue), as well as in the design, editing, layout, and playtesting. As far as the completed version of *Lost Laboratory of Kwalish* , I hope you consider checking it out for use around your table. And if you've already purchased a copy—thank you!

Finally, I would like to extend special acknowledgement of one of the designers involved. Laurence Withey's mother contacted us shortly after Gamehole Con, and asked us to pass along the unfortunate news of Laurence's peaceful passing earlier that week. She also asked that we include his photo as well as word that a nature garden on the farm where he grew up near Winchester, Hampshire will be made available for others experiencing cancer and other conditions.

As per Laurence's request, certain spells and magic items of his creation appear in *Lost Laboratory of Kwalish*. In addition, Storm Bunny Studios further created his character Galder. We hope these inclusions help honor Laurence's memory through one of the hobbies he enjoyed.

Thanks again, everyone.

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Appendix F: Additional Rumors

Tales of the legendary Barrier Peaks have circulated for centuries, passing from person to person and town to town across the length and breadth of the land—and the only one who knows the full truth of those tales is you. None of the following rumors connect directly to this adventure. But you can use them as alternative false rumors for the "Rumors and Legends" section, or as true inspiration for side treks and new adventures.

Additional Barrier Peaks Rumors

d100	Rumor
1	An ancient castle lies buried in the foothills of the Barrier Peaks. Hidden somewhere in its vaults are a *suit of invisibility* and a *ring of teleportation*!
2	A group of charitable drow who worship Bahamut have taken refuge in the Barrier Peaks. They are said to help travelers in need.
3	Legend tells of a cave inhabited by minotaur shamans that have fled the command of Baphomet, and that seek to free all their people from the demon lord's control. Those that bring them the knowledge and supplies they require are rewarded with gold and gemstones.
4	They say shadar-kai appear from time to time in those mountains, kidnapping aloof adventurers for the Raven Queen.
5	The Tharguard dwarves of the Barrier Peaks were powerful smiths. Channeling magic within their forges, they crafted the finest weapons in the land—until they vanished centuries ago. Recently, though, the clamor of hammer on anvil has been heard in remote chasms in the peaks once again. The Tharguard have returned, but no one knows why.
6	A dead god was buried beneath the Barrier Peaks eons ago. The blood of this god permeates the stone of the mountains, and its magic is channeled by the flora and fauna of the peaks.
7	Hunters have found wildlife in the Barrier Peaks slain by the precise burn marks of magic. Whatever creature is killing these beasts, it has no need for food or trophies, as the carcasses are simply left to rot.
8	On nights of the full moon, airships piloted by lycanthropes roam the mountain passes of the peaks, looking for travelers to infect and add to their savage crews.
9	Folk foraging for truffles near the base of the Barrier Peaks swear they saw three metal golems marching abreast, set with glowing red eyes that shot fire, and levitating over any obstacle in their path.
10	There ain't nothing good in them mountains, I can tell you that much. I've heard that magic works wrong up there, and every few weeks, some unseen cave belches out a new monstrosity hungering for flesh.
11	Lightning struck one of the Barrier Peaks, bringing it to life. Though it's still rooted in the soil, a maw-like cave entrance now howls in frustration in the Primordial tongue.
12	It's claimed that one of the Barrier Peaks rises so high, it tore a hole in the sky, allowing elemental creatures of air to enter this world.
13	The Barrier Peaks are said to house a vile laboratory, capable of reanimating undead that are immune to a cleric's holy power.
14	A family of space hamsters is looking for their long-lost child up in those mountains. Those otherworldly creatures won't rest until they're reunited.
15	I've heard tell of a terrible warrior who roams the Barrier Peaks—a beast of a man trapped in a suit of armor with gleaming golden eyes, and which spits fire and lightning from strange metallic wands. The only way to escape him is to put a body of water between the two of you, as he won't cross it.
16	Children speak of a ten-fingered raven that flies down from the peaks to open doors and whisper nightmares into the dark.
17	The owlbears that prowl the slopes of the Barrier Peaks are not what they seem.
18	A glowing dragon has crawled out from the roots of the Barrier Peaks. It searches now for an artifact that might save the creatures that live off its light.
19	Deep within the valleys of the Barrier Peaks grows an ancient fungus sought by a sect of mad druids. If they find it, they believe it will help them destroy the cities of the civilized races.
20	The tarrasque slumbers beneath the Barrier Peaks, and none know when the great beast might stir.
21	I've heard tell of an order of knights running a way station up in the Barrier Peaks. They promise rest and respite to anyone trying to cross the mountains. But most folks never make it to the other side.
22	There's a town of civilized mice somewhere in the peaks, where you can get a magic sword in trade for a cup of milk. Of course, the sword is the size of a needle, but any tailor will pay you good coin for it.
23	An old kenku who can interpret dreams and has knowledge of the future hides out in a cavern in the foothills of the peaks.
24	On some nights, a burst of yellow-white light flashes up above the peaks, visible for miles. Once in a while, a beam of emerald green descends from the heavens to the same spot.
25	There's something peculiar about a pool a few days' trek into the mountains. Magical trinkets and treasures have their effects amplified if submerged in it even a little while, but nothing good seems to come to anyone who wields that magic.

d100	Rumor
26	A large, finely crafted metal elk roams the Barrier Peaks. It's a phylactery gone rogue, and the souls consumed by the lich that crafted it can converse with those that stumble across it.
27	Beneath the Barrier Peaks lies a vast maze patrolled by undead minotaurs.
28	They say there's a cave in one of the high passes that even the gods can't see inside. But if you leave a silver piece at the entrance every sunset for a year and a day, you'll be granted a wish.
29	There's a strange curse or hex up in those peaks, and people who wander there should be wary. First, they get real tired and can't keep food down to save them. After a fortnight at the most, any cuts or scrapes don't mend right. It's not long after that they fall into a sleep and never wake up.
30	There's an ancient book hidden in a library in the peaks. Anything you write in that book, no matter how big or small, comes true in this world in the end.
31	One adventurer I heard of came back safe from an expedition to the Barrier Peaks—then promptly grew extra arms, turned purple, and lost his ability to speak. Folks say that the monsters in the peaks are all made that way. Adventurers transformed into beasts from the other realms by a curse that not even the most devoted clerics can heal.
32	In ages past, a star fell from the heavens and crashed within the Barrier Peaks. The first expedition to reach the site of this fallen star died inside a strange maze made of metal and light, guarded by golems with unnatural cunning.
33	A bizarre combination of beholder and flumph is said to float through the caves of the mountains, its eye rays inducing laughter and generosity . . . or turning one into a squirrel. What mad wizard would create such a thing?
34	Silent metal spheres lurk in the subterranean depths of the mountains, following adventurers who explore those depths.
35	Within a cave in a secluded valley, time twists and distorts. Travelers have returned from that place with stories of their companions frozen motionless for long minutes, or of repeating the same actions many times over before managing to escape.
36	In a mysterious village in the Barrier Peaks foothills, the inhabitants slaughter one another to the last each night. Yet the next day dawns with all the villagers alive, as if nothing had happened.
37	A beholder is trapped within a cavern of the mountains, as the result of some strange draw from a *deck of many things*. To pass the time, the creature stages plays with the monsters and prisoners it keeps.
38	The strangest noises come rumbling down from the Barrier Peaks at times. Screeches and howls, and enormous echoing thumps. It's enough to give a person the shudders.

d100	Rumor
39	Some say those peaks are so sharp that the gods cut their feet on them. That's why the rivers of the mountains run red every few years.
40	Some fool claimed that goblins kidnapped him and his cattle from the foothills of the Barrier Peaks, dragged them high up into the mountains—and then let them all go back home again like nothing had happened.
41	Strange metallic constructs haunt the Barrier Peaks, and only one wizard is said to have discovered the secret of controlling them.
42	A metal-walled cave in the mountains is sealed behind a magic door that opens and closes whenever a worthy traveler draws near. But who judges those travelers' worthiness, none can say.
43	A horrible whispering can be heard up in the mountains. Folks claim it's the ghosts of ancient explorers, trying to entice others into joining them in death.
44	The Barrier Peaks are home to an ancient league of aboleths, whose members conspire to punch a hole to the Far Realm in the fabric of reality.
45	A mysterious armored beholder roams the caverns of the Barrier Peaks, silent in its execution of all who intrude into its realm. Its eyestalks send forth rays of light that shine out suddenly in the darkness—and turn creatures they catch into dust!
46	A mysterious order of monks guards a lone keep high in the Barrier Peaks, said to imprison an immortal knight.
47	Old Otus came through town the other day, needing fresh supplies. He said huge frogs with tentacles ate his camp! Can ye believe that?
48	Beneath the Barrier Peaks is an ancient iron god once worshiped by the gnomes. Inside its metal form reside nightmarish creatures without souls.
49	Adventurers that have returned recently from the Barrier Peaks have lost the ability to talk about their emotions. Whenever they attempt to, they are simply struck dumb.
50	A group of rats that once belonged to a demented wizard have formed a tiny village within one of the lower crags of the Barrier Peaks. If you hear singing and the clinking of tiny mugs on a windless night, you'll know you're close.
51	Folk dwelling in the foothills of the peaks have been caught wandering as if in a trance into the mountains. When rescued, all reported the same thing: a long, bony finger beckoned them into the darkness, where writhing tendrils waited to snatch them up.
52	In more than one spot within the peaks, a strange hum emits from the earth without warning, and anything smaller than a fist begins to float a few inches off the ground.

d100	Rumor
53	My brother's best friend's uncle got lost up in the high trails of the peaks, swearing up and down that he'd fallen through a wall of wind and found a garden behind it full of strange plants. We all thought he was half mad, but he had the weirdest blue vine growing through the soles of his boots. We had to burn it off, and I tell you, that plant screamed.
54	A rare type of creature escaped a wizard's tower in the Barrier Peaks, resembling tiny plant people. Their bodies have begun washing up in the foothill rivers, still clutching little spears.
55	Somewhere deep within the peaks lies the lost tower of Mundar, named after a gnome wizard who loved children and created many magnificent magical toys. Those who claim to have found the tower tell tales of giant teddy bears and toy soldiers that guard against those who would ransack its workshop.
56	Even the best trackers are afraid of those mountains. They'll tell you that if you count the number of peaks before dark and make the same count the next morning, you'll never get the same number.
57	The Barrier Peaks house a guild of cunning gnomes, who love to test their creations on the settlements in the foothills below.
58	A sage dwelling in the foothills of the peaks was found dead, the top of her head cut off and her brain cleanly removed. Then a hunter returned from the high mountains says he saw a scuttling, crab-like monster there, with a brain floating in a transparent blister atop its head.
59	A farmer says he saw a metal humanoid wandering through the foothills while he was tending his sheep. The thing was screaming at the top of its lungs, babbling in some language he couldn't make out. It threw fire from its fingertips when it spotted him, and he says he was lucky to get away alive.
60	Folks say that when the spring warmth melts the snow on the Barrier Peaks, strange metal objects are washed downriver and eaten by fish. The halflings call this season "Fisher's Fortune" in their small river villages in the foothills.
61	It's said that the spirits of twin children haunt the Barrier Peaks—poor tykes who froze to death looking to pick flowers for their mother. Each seeks the other now, lost forever and begging strangers for aid. Tales talk of how one spirit will lead explorers to safety, while the other guarantees malicious calamity.
62	A few folks have reported seeing strange lights just above the peaks. Some claim they're the work of occultists performing diabolical rituals, while others say they're lost souls trying to lure folks to their doom.
63	The tarrasque dwells within the deepest caverns of the Barrier Peaks—but the creature is undead, held in a perpetual state of decay.

d100	Rumor
64	Rumors tell of an iron fortress nestled deep within the Barrier Peaks. No one knows how it got there, but some histories tell of how it appeared about the same time that a comet crashed into the mountains. The gods delivered this fortress, some say, and no mortal can enter without their permission.
65	A small group of humans and dwarves went into the Barrier Peaks seeking archeological finds. News was promising at first, including reports of a cave that held artifacts from ages long past, and the remains of creatures unlike anything ever discovered before. Then all word from the expedition suddenly ceased . . .
66	Symbols appear in the Barrier Peaks, scribed into the deepest caves and on the highest mountains alike. These glyphs glow and pulse, and come from no language ever spoken by mortals.
67	An old roc's nest clings to one of the higher slopes of the Barrier Peaks, with an old iron footlocker hidden within it. A reclusive mystic is said to have stored secretive writings in that chest, behind powerful magic wards.
68	Some sort of frog-god fell from the skies an aeon ago, and it waits now for one worthy enough to carry its religion to the world. Whoever finds this being and bows before it will become a demigod, leading the world into a new age of prosperity and order.
69	One of the highest of the Barrier Peaks has mysteriously lost its snowpack. No snow clings to its crags now, even in the middle of winter.
70	A trading caravan traveling through the Barrier Peaks returned without any of its merchants. All the pack animals and supplies were accounted for, none the worse for wear—except the caravan had lost every trace it carried of silk or cloth.
71	I've heard tales of a haunted monastery up in the peaks. Something about vengeful dead coming down to steal corpses, and taking them back to their forsaken abode.
72	No, it's not all woe and misery in the Barrier Peaks. There's a lost tavern up there, filled with perfectly preserved dwarven ale from the past millennia.
73	I've heard an old woman sometimes appears on the trails of the peaks, staring at you with huge black eyes. She might offer you some berries to eat, but those who take one are never heard from again!
74	A swarm of rust monsters wanders up in those mountains. Hundreds of them. Maybe thousands. What kind of metal they're finding up there to let them sustain those numbers, no one knows.
75	All this talk about yetis in the Barrier Peaks is just a rumor. I say there's a pack of wizards pretending to be yetis, trying to scare folks away from the peaks' real secret!

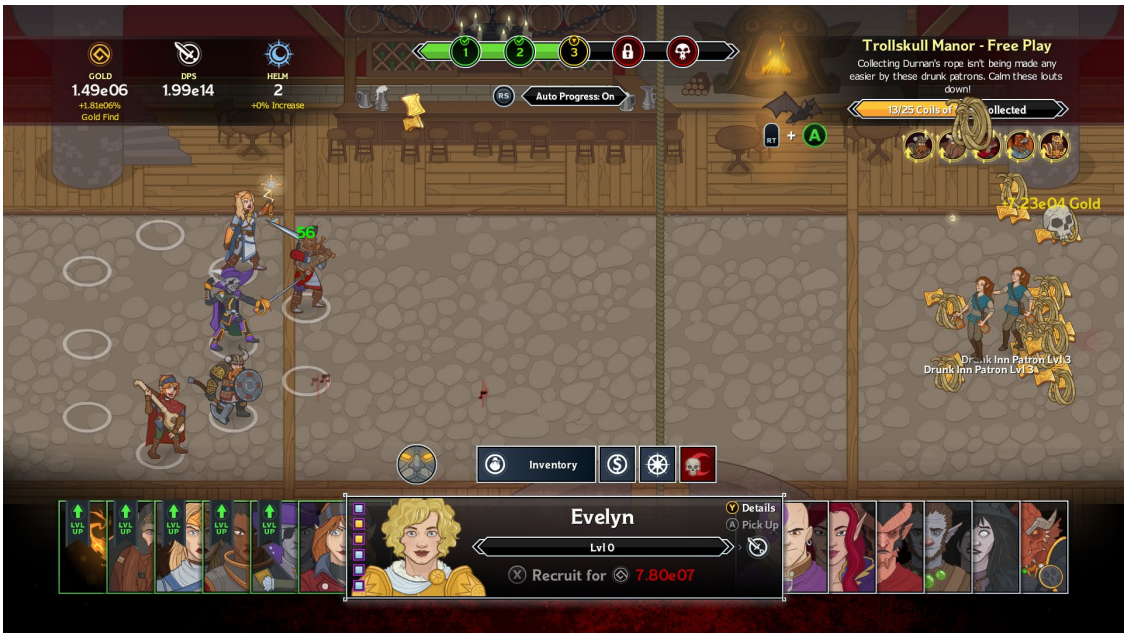
d100	Rumor
76	In ages past, the gods cast a flaming star down upon the Barrier Peaks. And all the time since, the peaks have been infected with horrors too shocking to fathom.
77	A mummy lord resides in an ancient tomb of the Barrier Peaks, guarding a huge treasure that once belonged to a family of vampire slayers.
78	Most kobolds are mere nuisances. But the members of the Brightclaw Clan of the Barrier Peaks wield strange metal crossbows that hum and glow with esoteric symbols. I saw my dwarf guide disintegrated by a red beam emitted from one of those unnatural magical things!
79	An ancient deity dwells within the Barrier Peaks, and speaks to its followers only in dreams. Those who meet this deity become blessed with eyes that glow in different colors, depending on who they speak to and what they say.
80	Somewhere within the Barrier Peaks, a massive city built into the cliffs is populated by a society of aarakocra and genasi. These creatures guard a passage into the Elemental Plane of Air, aided by tamed elementals.
81	A vault full of strange flying devices is hidden within the Barrier Peaks—and rumors say that a dragon has recently claimed the place.
82	A lost temple of the storm god is said to be hidden in the Barrier Peaks, and is home to a magical gem that can control the weather. Countless of the god's faithful have made expeditions to seek the site—and none have ever returned.
83	A sheer wall of ice at the height of the Barrier Peaks has a surface that is marred by peculiar shapes. Tales tell that those shapes are magical molds through which creatures of elemental cold are spawned.
84	The top of one of the Barrier Peaks is fake. An illusion! Tales tell of a village up there, populated by halflings who love the cold.
85	I heard there be rabbit-men in the peaks, with spears that throw fire.
86	Caverns abound in the Barrier Peaks that are filled with rubies—all of them crystallized out of the blood of innocents and cursed to bring an early death to those that carry them.
87	The entire range of the Barrier Peaks is actually the ribs of some great, sleeping skeletal beast. Those quakes that tremble through the mountains from time to time? That's it starting to wake up. It's coming.
88	People know the Barrier Peaks but often forget what it is they were named for. Those mountains make a protective wall guarding civilized lands from the nightmares and dark magic that spawn on their far side. And every time some explorer cuts a new trail across the peaks, that barrier weakens.

d100	Rumor
89	Folk talk about the Barrier Peaks as home to wraiths and other apparitions, but I say those mountains are a laboratory for the mind flyers. I've walked those trails. I've have heard the blood-curdling screams that come from deep within those mountains. And I've seen the empty look in those that survive the journey to the peaks and back.
90	On a stormy day, elemental power surges in the Barrier Peaks, and the clouds between the mountains become thick enough to walk on.
91	A cabal of gnome mages built an arcane engine in the Barrier Peaks meant to open up a gate to another world.
92	Metal creatures up in the higher passes of the peaks make strange musical sounds. But most of those who investigate that music never return to talk of it.
93	The higher reaches of the Barrier Peaks stay frozen even into summer. Digging in these spots can turn up the corpses of explorers who died there, along with all their gear—and the spirits of those angry dead.
94	I once heard a loudmouth explorer show off what they called a "power coin" in an adventurer's tavern. It looked like blue glass to me, but they swore it could charge up magical devices.
95	Somewhere deep in a cave in the Barrier Peaks flows a waterfall of molten gold.
96	A deranged transmuter had a secret lab somewhere in the Barrier Peaks, folk say. No one's found it yet—but adventurers have spotted a creature in the mountains partway between a sloth and a porcupine, attacking with razor sharp claws and poisoned quills.
97	Many of the stones in the Barrier Peaks are hollow, and those stones sing their secret knowledge during storms. Those songs can lead discerning listeners to hidden treasures . . . or unseen dangers.
98	A hidden glade of petrified trees in the Barrier Peaks is tended by a stone giant dreamwalker.
99	Some say the paths and tunnels of the Barrier Peaks take weeks or months to traverse, while others claim to navigate the same routes in mere days. Stranger still, charting your route in the peaks is most unreliable. Many's the explorer that's used stars and compass to plot a course, only to find themselves back at the beginning edge of the place where the trip began.
100	The Soul Catcher, they call it. Its victims stagger out of the Barrier Peaks with nary a scratch on their bodies, but their hearts aren't right anymore. The lucky ones are caught by the healers and confined to places where they can't hurt anyone. The ones who aren't so lucky . . . Well, you tell me. What would you call an adventurer who can't feel the slightest tinge of remorse or guilt or fear?

Idle Champions on Console

Having conquered the PC and mobile gaming worlds the *Idle Champions of the Forgotten Realms* are battling their way onto consoles. Codename Entertainment's Chris Dupuis chatted with *Dragon+* to explain the leap to a new platform.

The world's first idle strategy game set in the celebrated universe of the Forgotten Realms has enjoyed amazing success since launch, and its push for world domination is about to take a new step. Previously available on Steam for Windows PC and Mac OSX, as well as for iPad on the App Store and for Android tablet on Google Play, *Idle Champions of the Forgotten Realms is coming soon to gaming consoles!*



A comparison of the PC (top) and console user interfaces. (Select to view)

The continued rise of *Idle Champions* is partly down to the fact that it goes well beyond what defines an 'idle' video game. Players have to gather their Champions, assemble a party, and optimize their Formation Strategy as they head out on adventures.

"I feel *Idle Champions* has so much more to offer than just clicker gameplay, and we like to describe it as a strategy management game," says Chris Dupuis, Live Services Manager at Codename Entertainment. "At its core it is all about going on adventures, collecting and upgrading Champions and maximizing your formation to push further every time."

Turning D&D into a clicker game is a rewarding experience because of the depth of rich, diverse content that's available to draw upon. *Idle Champions* currently includes over 200 adventures (and variants) with more added each week, while the twelve starting Champions are a small part of a roster that has now reached thirty-five.

There are three evergreen campaign routes to play through

(Select to view)

with content pulled directly from some TRPG modules: players start on a grand tour of the Sword Coast; can plumb the depths of the *Tomb of Annihilation* campaign; and even pit their wits against Waterdeep's villains in the *Dragon Heist* campaign. Each adventure sees players travel through fifty areas, with a boss every five areas. As players progress, the enemies drop more gold but they also become stronger—spending that gold levels up the Champions so they can hit back harder. Champions can upgrade their specializations and quest for epic weapons such as Drizzt Do'Urden's legendary swords, Icingdeath and Twinkle.

However, unlocking new Formation abilities is the real key to success and sets *Idle Champions* apart from other clicker games. Learning how to combine each Champion's abilities to maximize their potential helps players defeat an onslaught of increasingly powerful monsters.

(Select to view)

"Formation abilities are where the game truly shines," explains Dupuis. "For example, Celeste heals those in the column ahead of her but also grants a big damage boost to those adjacent to her, so placing her behind your tanks but next to your higher damage-dealing heroes is key to pushing further each time. Bruenor has an ability called Rally which increases the damage of those in his column so you want to place him in a column with your damage dealers.

"As you unlock more heroes each one will open up new strategies for your formations and help you min/max your way to your wall, or give you the ability to craft your own adventuring team based on who you want to play with. Do you love Dice, Camera, Action!, Acquisitions Incorporated The "C" Team, Force Grey or R.A. Salvatore's Companions of the Hall? We've got Champions from all of those groups, with a new Champion coming out every three weeks or so. There's always new adventures, Champions, and content to play through!"

NEW BEGINNINGS

Since the game is currently available on multiple formats, you might expect the switch to consoles to be an easy transition. Yet the different control systems used on those varied gaming technologies meant *Idle Champions* needed to be fully redeveloped for Xbox and PS4. Dupuis says the team has spent the past few months "gutting" the user interface and updating it for console players.

"Playing on a console is not the same as playing with a keyboard or a mouse. To that end we've completely revised the UI so it's fun and exciting for someone playing with a controller on console. We initially released a gamepad user interface to our Steam players as an optional way for them to play and reached out to some of the more dedicated members of our community to solicit feedback.

"We had a ton of players excited about the changes and we worked closely with them to revise and revamp it following their feedback. Thanks to that and all the hard work the team has been doing behind the scenes, I'm really excited to hear what console folks have to say about the new experience."

Despite those necessary changes to the interface, Dupuis feels the console version captures the look, feel, and playability of the original

game.

"I think we have retained the simplicity of the game—which I love—while also revising and updating areas of the user interface. As part of that upgrade we developed new portraits for all the heroes," he says, noting major changes to the PC interface.

VLAHNYA UM'VAIRAR

It's no surprise to see iconic Forgotten Realms characters such as Bruenor, Celeste, and Minsc and Boo appear in *Idle Champions of the Forgotten Realms*. But it's equally exciting to see the inclusion of characters from livestreams such as *Force Grey*, Acquisitions Incorporated *The "C" Team*, and *Dice, Camera, Action!*

The latest character to join this roster is Vlahnya Um'Vairar from *Maze Arcana*, which airs on the official D&D Twitch channel on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. To say that Vlahnya's creator, Dungeon Master Satine Phoenix, is excited about the collaboration with *Idle Champions of the Forgotten Realms* is something of an understatement.

"This is so cool!" she tells *Dragon+*. "I never, *ever* in any fantasy dream I've had thought Vlahnya would come to life. She was born in 1992 and has evolved in many renditions and she is more beautiful in this video game than I could have imagined."

Phoenix shared her cosplay from the Stream of Many Eyes event with the *Idle Champions* artists, including links to the livestream and photos, and they went to work. "I am so grateful because I don't think I had more than one teensy change during the entire process," she says. "And coming up with all of her powers and converting the character to *Idle Champions* was a group collaboration that was really fun!"

"In the PC version of the game, the portraits of the characters are taken straight from their character model. In this new iteration, our artists have spent a lot of time to bring those characters to life in an exciting style. Additionally, our PC user interface actually covers a lot of those great images our artists created. On the console we are able to pull back the curtain and allow players to fully experience the enemies that are determined to take your party down."

SHARED EXPERIENCES

Dupuis says the game won't offer cross-platform play because of the limitations of certain platforms. However, all the current heroes, gear, and upgrades will be available on the console versions. "When we launch this month, *Idle Champions* will be in the middle of the Simril event so that won't be available on console. But our long-term goal is to launch with parity on all five platforms each week, so players on PC, iPad, Android tablets, PS4, and Xbox can enjoy the same features," Dupuis says. The move to a different platform also brings bonuses that both new players and old can enjoy. The console launch will kick off a ten-day celebration that includes daily streaming events and a week of free game content for early adopters. Players on every platform will still benefit, though.

"In addition, we're launching a Founder's Pack bundle on console for $19.99 that'll include what is usually a $50 pack of gold chests to get your Champions geared up, as well as a *ton* of other freebies and exclusive content. But because we want all of our players to share the experience and excitement, the free content and Founder's Pack will also be available on all other platforms."

Free content, famous characters, regular updates with content inspired by official Dungeons & Dragons adventures, as well as limited-time events and additional campaign adventures? No wonder Polygon's Brian Gilbert, who scours the internet for great cheap games, dubbed it "a free game worth playing" in a video asking " Why is this idle game so fun?"

Idle Champions of the Forgotten Realms is released on PS4 on 11 December and on Xbox on 14 December 2018. Visit the official website *to find out more or download the game now on* **Windows PC and Mac OSX , iPad or Android tablet .**

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D&D Online

As Dungeons & Dragons Online approaches its 13th anniversary, James Pickard chats with Senior Product and Brand Manager **Amanda Grow** and Executive Producer **Rob Ciccolini** to pay tribute to its community and reveal the secrets of its latest expansion.

Since its debut in 2006 Dungeons & Dragons Online has been on quite a journey. Following the transition to the free-to-play model, the MMORPG has regularly rolled out new content for its fans, comfortably maintaining its player base in a world where competition is rife. Now it prepares to pass another big milestone as its thirteen-year anniversary approaches in February 2019.

Over the years its passionate players have enjoyed taking their tabletop adventures into the digital realm. With that big birthday celebration on the horizon as the game enters its teenage years, what

do the people behind it think have been the standout moments?

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“It’s always the community response. Whether it’s the early days when we first went free-to-play and you could see people really embrace what that was about, or more recently when we created the *Ravenloft* expansion,” says Amanda Grow, Senior Product and Brand Manager. “It’s really gratifying to hear the players respond that way about the fact that this game is almost thirteen years old but it continues to improve and add really cool features.”

That passion has been important for the team to harness. Knowing that many who come to DDO have a history of roleplaying and a love for D&D has created certain expectations that need to be fulfilled. There’s also the unique challenge of recreating the freedom of a D&D tabletop experience in a video game.

That’s superbly realized in the game’s character creation system, which allows so much room for choice and different builds that there are an astronomical number of permutations for even just the fighter class—and that’s before you throw multi-classing into the mix. The community thrives on finding new ways to master their chosen role after years of play or challenging themselves to come up with quirky builds to keep their character choices fresh.

“One of the interesting things about having a game that’s been around for almost thirteen years is the sheer amount of content or

options for characters," explains Executive Producer Rob Ciccolini.

Stories to Tell

With over a decade of development under its belt, the game also has a vast catalogue of fascinating quests, dungeons, and other content for those characters to enjoy. It's another aspect that makes an MMO drawing from the rich history of D&D so appealing.

"It's also very satisfying to see a lot of the adventures and other elements I played when I was younger come to life in the game," says Ciccolini. "As much as I like to see the new content and that's also fun, seeing older adventures come to life has a certain nostalgia value. Whether it's *Ravenloft*, *White Plume Mountain*, or *Haunted Halls*, I have a fondness for our classic packs."

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While creating new content or bringing old modules into the game might seem like a straightforward job, the designers do have to make some changes to make the classic D&D rulesets fit the mechanics of an MMORPG. The key is to create content that fits the D&D aesthetic while also working in a vastly different gaming space.

"Our jobs are to bring joy to players. So we try to find a combination of gameplay ideas that we think will be fun and also introduce story

elements that will provide emotional impact—whether that comes from the satisfaction of playing them or other interesting twists. Those are the two pillars that drive a lot of what we do in terms of designing new content," says Ciccolini.

Variety is also an important goal for the team, ensuring that players always see something new and exciting on the horizon. That's where updates such as the recent addition of cosmetic cloaks (worn items that actually change the visual appearance of your character when equipped) or regular seasonal events come in.

Scaling New Heights

As part of that continual journey of discovery, players will soon be able to venture forth to a new location. Appearing at the heart of the Eberron campaign setting will be a towering, vertical metropolis that stretches high into the skies above and plummets down into the depths below. At the top the wealthy reside, while at the bottom its inner-workings can be found. This is the city of Sharn.

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Players must travel there in search of a stolen artifact that was taken during the *Disciples of Rage* storyline. What the thief intends to do with the artifact remains a mystery so players must cross the sea,

enter Sharn, and learn to navigate its unique threats and power players in order to return the item back to its rightful place.

"Sharn is the biggest city in Eberron and one of the things about it is it's not horizontal, it's vertical. As we're laying out the actual pieces of Sharn for the players to adventure in, they can look up and down and may experience content in the highest heights and then the lowest depths," Ciccolini explains.

The team at Standing Stone Games has used all that space to its full potential. Quests and dungeons will offer players different types of adventuring experiences depending on where they choose to go in the city.

"Going from all the way down into the very bowels of the city into the highest echelons where players will deal with the nobles offers a great variety of storylines for the upcoming Sharn event," Ciccolini continues. "Players can go down into an area called the Cogs, where all the weird gear and magical pieces that make the city run exist. This has been overrun and is a dangerous place. But they can also interact with high society, which is a nice juxtaposition."

Ciccolini describes this urban adventure as being full of "villains that are characters rather than monsters," adding with a smile: "Not that there won't be plenty of stuff like that dwelling in the Cogs for the players to find and maybe get eaten by!"

Random Encounters

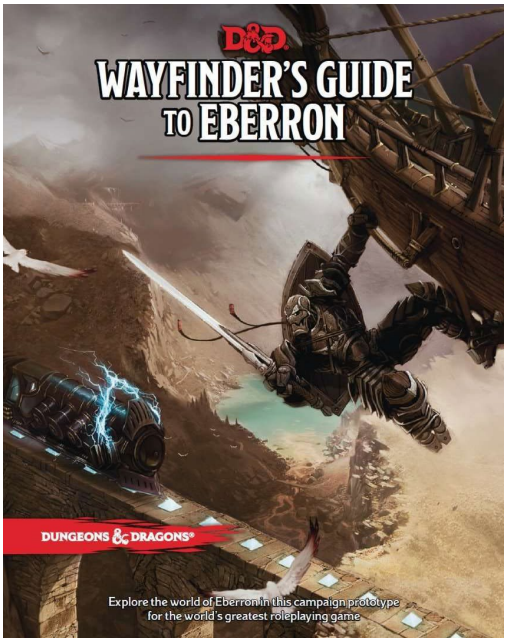
That's not the only way Standing Stone Games is experimenting with its approach to adventuring in the *Sharn* expansion. While previously established elements will still be in evidence, the team is introducing exciting new changes to provide a greater sense of exploration and a few surprises along the way.

" *Sharn* will have a lot of raid content but will also have more exploratory content in the Cogs that's a little different," Ciccolini says. "Not only will you have dungeons in the main storyline, but you'll also be able to explore the Cogs and have some more surprising encounters."

"It's a bit of a departure," Grow adds. "Traditionally players are used to interacting with a collection of quest givers who tell them which dungeons they can visit, and that lets them know these dungeons are just sitting there. But having a space where they can roam around and find opportunities for adventures themselves—adventures they may not know the exact location of or when they'll be available—adds another option for play."

Eberron Reborn

The world of Eberron was first born in 2002 when Wizards of the Coast launched a worldwide search for a new campaign setting. Keith Baker's creation is now supported within fifth edition D&D having recently been added to the Dungeon Masters Guild in the form of the *Wayfarer's Guide to Eberron*, which fuses new mechanics into its handbook.



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Maze Arcana Dungeon Master Ruty Rutenberg uses the setting in his latest livestream, *Inkwell Society*. This electric "Neon Noir" finds the adventurers in the disenfranchised lower Duras of the floating city of Sharn. It's a setting where the abundance of low magic fuels everyday life, with lightning rails, air ships, warforged, shifters, kalashtar, and changelings all trying to make their way in the world alongside the beloved fantasy races of elves, dwarves, halflings, half elves and humans.

Season two, which premiered on Halloween, shows every Wednesday at 7PM PT on the official D&D Twitch channel.

Alongside new gameplay, the *Sharn* expansion also adds the popular tiefling race to the MMORPG for the first time. The developers have spent a lot of time working out the different aspects of how this race will look and function in game.

"We're working on how we're going to create the tails, and as tieflings are a horned race we are also thinking how we want those horns to look with various character options. Our animators have always been very good at giving little animation layers to the races so we can provide a wide variety of looks to various characters," reveals Ciccolini. "And the animators are obviously excited because creating a new race always involves creating a new dance. So how are tieflings going to dance?"

Players who want to immediately dive in with the new race can opt to play an 'iconic' tiefling, which provides them with a pre-built 15th level character ready to journey into Sharn.

Instant Adventures

The *Sharn* expansion for Dungeons & Dragons Online once again shows how this MMORPG has taken the tabletop game and created something that allows players to hop online, find like-minded players and be a part of an adventure within minutes.

"It's not only a love letter to Dungeon & Dragons, it's also a love letter to all of the people who play and the process of grouping together and forming parties to enjoy it," says Ciccolini.

"We allow you to play the way you want to play and for me that embodies the spirit of D&D. DDO has always lent itself very well to that concept," echoes Grow. "It's having adventures and fun with your friends in a way that is enjoyable for you. Because there's something to be said for all those quirky moments that happen at the table where your friend did a really neat thing or those cool ideas that somebody built from scratch."

That spirit will continue beyond the upcoming *Sharn* expansion and into the future of Dungeons & Dragons Online. Because while the current focus is on the Spring 2019 release for *Sharn*, the team is already toying with other potential iconic locations and settings from D&D history. The Isle of Dread, anyone? So expect many years of adventures still to come once the cake has been cut for the 13th anniversary celebrations in February!

Dungeons & Dragons Online by Standing Stone Games is a free-

to-play MMORPG for PC and Mac. Download the game to play a unique hero from thirteen classes and eight races, using thousands of combinations of skills and feats.

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Behind the Screen: Visual Impairment and D&D

Dragon+ spoke with those trying to make roleplaying more accessible to players with sight issues to see what more can be done to include them.

"The power of Dungeons & Dragons is that you can play different roles," says Greg Tito, Senior Communications Manager at Wizards of the Coast, who has been putting that idea into practice as part of the *Clerical Error* live-stream. Inspired by the work of producer and roleplayer Jennifer Kretchmer, who champions D&D players with disabilities, Tito chose to play a blind character called Faben.

"Jennifer uses Dungeons & Dragons to allow players to step outside the norm and feel a little heroic when they might not get to feel that way in their own lives," he explains. "She thought it would be instructive if a lot more people were telling stories about characters with disabilities that

Greg Tito's blind chracter, Faben (courtesy of Luke McKay

don't restrict their heroism in any way. I thought that was a really interesting idea because I'd never played a character that wasn't in full control of all their limbs or wasn't able to use all their senses.

"We had that conversation just as I was thinking about what my character would be like for this live-stream and I decided he would be blind because I thought that would be very interesting to roleplay."

Jess Dempsey

"Roleplaying has no boundaries. It's all in your head so it's one of those perfect things that everyone can enjoy," agrees Jess Dempsey, who now heads up DOTS—a soon-to-be non-profit promoting accessibility in gaming for visually impaired players. "If you think about how many games of D&D are played at schools or community centers it would be perfect to also have the game played at centers for the blind where all they need is their imagination to get going and to play a game that might last 20 years or more."

DOTS was created by Jack Berberette, who started the project as a way to help his friend D, a blind gamer and DM, have more independence when it came to running and playing games. Berberette started out by creating braille dice designs and then used crowd fundraising to buy a braille printer to create books for D.

"And everything kind of snowballed from there," says Dempsey. "We're now all about donations and getting dice and books into the hands of the people who need them."

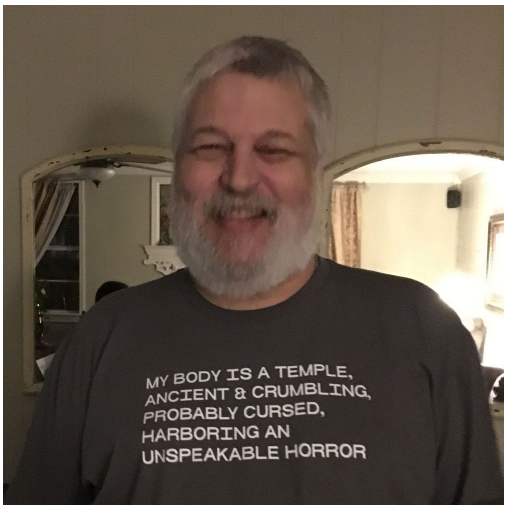
Understanding Blindness

Having taken the decision to play a blind character Tito was aware that he needed to learn more about the condition.

"I suddenly realized I didn't understand blindness. I don't know what it's like to actually be a person who cannot see. Visuals are such an important part of our everyday lives and I had never even thought about it," he admits. "That's one of the powers of roleplaying; it can allow you to step into someone else's shoes.

"But I wanted to make sure I portrayed it in a way that didn't feel insulting or misrepresent a blind person's experience. My goal is to make them feel like heroes just like any other character on the table."

Tito reached out to Kretchmer to see if she could connect him with a blind player to give him some pointers. She put him in contact with Temple Smith, a Dungeons & Dragons player and DM who is visually impaired and has made it his goal to speak to sighted people



Temple Smith

and share what a blind person's experiences are really like.

Smith started out playing Avalon Hill board games in the 1970s and first played Dungeons & Dragons in 1980. He still plays a weekly game with his school friends and has played just about every kind of roleplaying game available. In 2009 he lost his sight for eight months and was totally blind until eye surgery restored the sight in one eye. He was happy to dispel some of the common misconceptions.

"There's nothing wrong with being blind and I don't have a bad life because of it," Smith tells *Dragon+*. "I'm just as happy and fulfilled as someone who can see. I simply live in a different world than those people. It's not a worse world, it's just a different world."

Smith admits that it is frustrating to be misrepresented so often by the mainstream media. With that in mind he was able to guide Tito past some of the more common pitfalls in the portrayal of his character.

"When blind people are portrayed on TV they have a pole or stick they tap out in front of them. Temple said many times that the action of swinging the pole extremely far back and forth, with an arc that's six feet in front of the person as they're walking down the streets, is unrealistic," Tito explains.

"People who are blind have a good estimation of how wide their body is and they're only waving it back and forth three feet. It's only important whether there's something directly ahead of them and they're not worried about running into something four feet to the left. I thought that was a really interesting insight."

Engaging other players in the game meant dodging another common misconception about visual impairment. Tito thought it would be

possible to mimic a blind man talking to a sighted character by gazing into the middle-distance. He wanted to sell the fact that Faben is not looking directly at whoever he's talking to but Smith again suggested that's not always the case.

"He said it's not like a blind person will have their back to whoever's talking because they will obviously have a general sense of where people are. And in order to show that you're paying attention you orient your body to look in the right direction. You might not be making eye contact but it will never be that cartoony action that says, 'Where am I looking?'" Tito advises.

The Daredevil Effect

Tito also initially wanted Faben to wear Daredevil-style red-tinted glasses or regular sunglasses but was dissuaded by Smith.

"That's an easy go-to in television and movies to illustrate someone who's blind. But when you go blind they don't immediately issue you dark glasses," Smith says with a laugh. "I warned him off that because for a sighted person to be wearing dark glasses and pretending to be blind would be very insensitive to some. It doesn't bother me because I understand that people are trying to convey something that's difficult to portray. But some people will think they're being mocked."

The other major stereotype is what Smith refers to as "the Daredevil effect" where the world thinks that going blind makes all other senses more attuned. "You do notice them more but that level of increase in their effectiveness is just not true," he says. "I can't close my eyes and hear people walking around in the other room and know exactly where they are. But television and movies play that up.

"And when there's a dangerous situation that happens around blind people on screen they're always suddenly terrified because they can't see what's going on. That's also not true. People that can't see are just as courageous—if not more so—than others in a crisis situation."

The DOTS project aims to improve the use of braille for RPGs. (Select to view)

Character props aside, Smith was also able to impart some invaluable advice about how a blind character would function in a game based on his real-world experience. For example, if a blind person wants to move quickly from one area to another they might take up a friend's elbow rather than fending for themselves and be guided that way.

"It's not necessarily holding hands but more like grabbing an elbow so you know you're not going to walk into something in front of you and can be positioned in the right direction for whatever is going on in the adventure," Tito says.

"That's also true for actions beyond walking. If Faben's going to examine something with his hands I have one of the companions put his hands where they need to be. I'm playing a cleric so I trust my companions to help with healing or laying on hands to do the touch spells."

Clerical Duties

Tito shared all the advice he'd been given with the DM for *Clerical Error*, Lauren Urban.

"We talked ahead of time about how to address Faben's blindness in a semi-accurate way in a world of magic without it making his character ineffective. We also talked with the players to instill strong connections between several of the characters so the few times Faben would need assistance it wouldn't be a burden," she adds.

Urban found the biggest challenge with DMing for a blind character was making sure she described things in more detail than simply what the players could see.

Lauren Urban

"It was important that Faben could succeed on checks that would usually be visual and in order to make that happen I needed to come up with ways to describe things by smell, hearing or a change in the air. It frankly pushed me to be a better DM as it made me think about the world from more than just a visual perspective."

One part of the game the pair needed to consider carefully was combat. Tito reasoned that Faben would depend on spells like *detect magic* or *detect evil* because those would still function for him.

"He would still be able to pinpoint a target based on those and I thought that was a good way to make it playable when we did get into combat," he says.

"One good combo is if I have *detect magic* up and one of the other characters casts *light* on something like a stone. I can then determine where they are based on the blue glow of the *light* spell in a way I wouldn't be able to with a normal torch."

In actual fact there's been little combat to worry about as much of the game has focused on interpersonal relationships and problem-solving.

"The whole *Clerical Error* cast is much more interested in roleplaying than combat!" confirms DM Urban. "So far there has only been *one* combat, which happened during our Extra Life game and lasted a single round before one character managed to persuade

themselves out of fighting!”

Practical Help

One important breakthrough to help the visually impaired engage with D&D is the ability to create braille dice that can be read by blind players who have that skill.

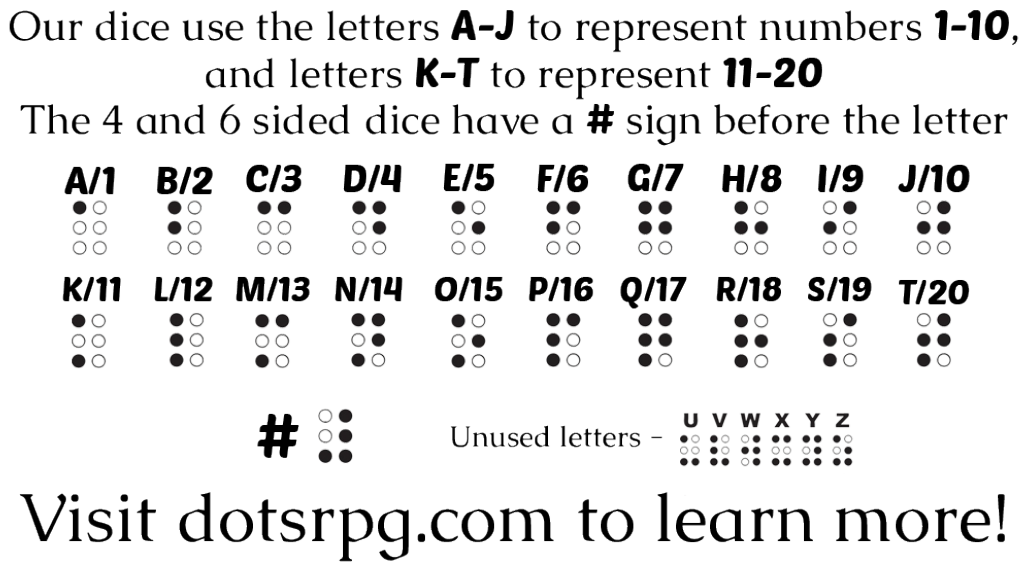
“This is definitely something people were actively looking for and players wanted to see,” suggests Dempsey, who says since DOTS first started producing the braille dice they’ve created a few different versions.

Braille dice. (Select to view)

Traditionally braille has no number symbols and a “#” sign is placed next to a letter to signify it is a number. For example, “A” equals number “1”, “B” is number “2”. The DOTS design eventually took a different approach.

“Once you start doing double digits you usually double the letters, such as ‘AA’. Instead we changed it up and it went to letter ‘K’ because a braille reader would find it easily understandable. K is the eleventh number of the alphabet so that must signify number ’11’,” she details, having also written a blog about 3D printing the dice.

“We also removed the ‘#’ sign because if you are holding a d20 in your hand you know that it contains numbers. It was just taking up extra space at that point.”



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DOTS sells its braille dice already printed via Shapeways.com but a full set of dice costs around $60 and Dempsey is aware that's out of some players' price range. Thanks to donations the organization has now been able to purchase its own 3D printer and once a system is in place will be selling them on its own site for closer to $30 to cover the cost of materials and shipping.

On top of that, DOTS plans to donate braille dice to game stores, schools, and libraries to encourage blind player participation. The 3D template files are also available for free on the DOTS website in a similar spirit of collaboration and sharing.

"Whether it be schools, libraries or businesses that have access to 3D printers we're encouraging people to download the files, print a batch themselves and donate them to local gamers," Dempsey advises. "People are free to do what they want with dice printed from our files with the limit that they're not allowed to sell them."

Spoken and Printed Word

One other technical advance that should help improve the lives of visually impaired players is the improvement of screen readers. Having a piece of software take the written word of a book or adventure and read that text aloud instantly brings it to life. Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Screen readers deal best with

PDFs or websites when they have been optimized for the technology and that doesn't always happen as standard.

"It's easy to change a PDF so it's screen reader friendly if you're doing that from the beginning. It's the same with web development because in the HTML programming language you can label things like 'Header', 'Paragraph', and 'Footer' so the reader recognizes them and treats them accordingly. It'll say, 'OK, this is the title of the page so I need to read this first. This is a paragraph so I need to read this second," says Dempsey.

"If the formatting is clear at the very start it's a seamless transition to make it screen reader-friendly. If you're trying to do that after the fact it's a lot harder. So it's really about coding PDF, Word, InDesign or HTML documents to have those labels and that's often something the software will have built in as an accessibility feature."

"The hardest thing for screen readers to deal with is websites because they break things up on a page into blocks. The screen reader might only read the text in one block and then direct you to something else on the same page so it's very disjointed and hard to understand," adds Smith, who says he found salvation in D&D Beyond.

"Fifth edition was new around the time I got some of my sight back but I wasn't able to play it straight away because all of that information was hidden away in books that I couldn't access," he remembers. "And then D&D Beyond came out and I could access that. I have a desktop computer with a 32-inch monitor that I can change the contrast on. So I can lean in close to that and read the text which meant I was able to start gaming again. I currently run two campaigns of my own."

Backstory Bonus

Tito's character in *Clerical Error* has been well received and he feels Faben has been successfully brought to life as a blind D&D character. That's largely been down to the group's excellent roleplaying and a touch of humor.

"The success of this character has mostly come through the storytelling and I've also been able to land a good joke every once in a while. For example, Demetrios Feredinos' character Jeff has been

wearing a fake beard that's obviously fake. A few sessions back I said something along the lines of, 'I'm blind and even I can tell that it's fake,'" he says.

"Temple specifically called that out in an email to me and said, 'That's exactly the kind of joke I would tell as a blind guy. You nailed that.' So I'm glad that worked."

"Him doing this is so wonderful for the blind gaming community," Smith says. "It's much easier to make a character that's interesting in some way but not that difficult to play and not many people would take the time or the effort to do this.

"He's willing to take a risk and possibly embarrass himself in order to help show that we don't have a lesser life because of our sight and we're not weaklings that have to be rescued. I really appreciate him taking that chance."

"For Faben it's a detail," confirms Tito. "It's a big part of his backstory but it's not a defining feature of this character because there are so many other great stories that have come through all the other things that have been going on in his life."

One of the cool aspects of playing Faben was coming up with that backstory. If the cleric wasn't born blind how would he have lost his sight? Tito made the character an acolyte of Lathander who was able to speak to his god a little easier than his fellow acolytes could. Because of that Faben was a prankster who felt he could get away with more than the others. When Waterdeep's new head of the church of Lathander took offence at a frowny face drawn on one of the temple statues he punished the prank by placing Faben in a chamber with an open door to the sun.

"Faben was in solitary confinement and told to pray to the sun, always looking at it. Over the course of that week he took the head of the church at his word and by the time it was over he could no longer see," Tito recalls. "He also couldn't receive any of the blessings of Lathander or cast any of the spells he was once able to cast. So the head of the church threw him out and let him fend for himself in Waterdeep."

Faben wandered around like an urchin for a long time before he met

Riza and Jeff, two members of the Dungsweepers' Guild. Through speaking with Riza he found a patron in the nature goddess Mielikki and began his work to beautify the city and make it as green as possible by sweeping up the dung and using it as fertilizer when planting trees. His mix of spells are now more nature-focused to reflect that devotion.

Future Plans

Although a lot of good work has already taken place the movement to make roleplaying more inclusive for visually impaired gamers is just beginning. DOTS isn't resting on its laurels having created braille dice and worked with companies to highlight best practices for gamers. Dempsey also hopes to create a worldwide lending library supplying braille books to game stores, while sending any store that participates a set of braille dice they can keep in-house.

According to Dempsey, DOTS is hoping to create other gaming aids alongside those dice: "We're looking to make something like a domino-sized token that will have numbers on it and can be used to track health points, spell slots and things of that nature. We're also in talks to create a dynamic fifth edition braille character sheet. There are certain labels for ability scores such as Strength and Dexterity that always stay the same and those would be fixed braille. Next to those is the number that can change and we can do that either by inserting a card with a number on it or by using a spinning dial. We're still working that out.

On top of that, DOTS also hopes to start a twice-yearly event to encourage disabled gamers to come out and meet their community.

"It would be similar to Tabletop Day and we'd encourage other players to speak to a blind player and learn about the issues they have while playing the game. The same goes for board games because there are a lot of games that could be adapted for visually impaired gamers."

Community Outreach

Reaching out to a community can be a two-way street for gamers. Not only will they learn about how to include players with disabilities in their regular games, they can also gain valuable advice on how to

play a character affected by the same issues.

"If you're going to play a character with disabilities an interesting way to do it is to reach out to people in that community and get information from them. This is much easier to do using online communities than it would have been 20 years ago," Tito advises.

"It was extremely enlightening to speak to a D&D player who also has the life experience that I'm trying to portray. That kind of dialogue is important and the best piece of advice I could give to someone is don't make assumptions. Don't go off what an abled person can glean from TV or movies. There is no substitute for speaking to people who have that experience."

Smith identifies himself on Twitter as the "Sightling Whisperer"—sightlings being the name visually impaired people give to those with regular sight.

"I explain blind people to the sightlings. On the eighteenth of every month I do an 'Ask Me Anything – blind guy' session. People can ask me about running or playing in games or just questions about blindness in general. I understand that people are curious and might want to ask a blind person a certain question but may be too embarrassed to ask. My catchphrase is: ignorance is the enemy. So I try to help them."

Dempsey looks forward to a world where the work DOTS currently does has become obsolete. "I would love to see the DOTS project not be needed anymore. I would love to see publishers and companies—not just those in the games industry but in any field—thinking about accessibility first. It would be amazing if in five years everybody in the games industry was already doing this. I'd be fine with that."

Until then games like *Clerical Error* can help spread understanding. "So far the reception has been positive. I think there are many ways to portray a character with a disability and my goal has been to make sure that the character is not defined by it but it is just part of who

they are," says Urban. "They are not a hero *despite* being blind or *because* they are blind—they just happen to be blind."

You can find out more about the work DOTS does at its official website and connect with Temple Smith , Greg Tito , and Lauren Urban on Twitter. Clerical Error recently finished its initial season on the official Dungeons & Dragons Twitch channel and you can find the archives here .

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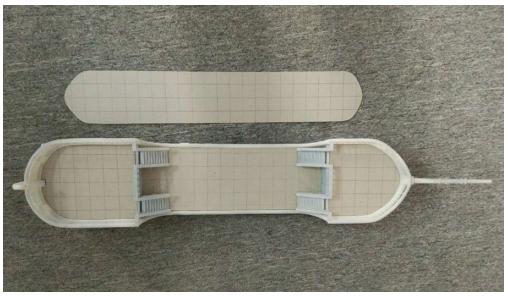
WizKids Falling Star Ship

When teenage DM Chris Perkins drew the map for a sailing ship little did he know it would one day become an amazing prop worthy of tabletop adventures. *Dragon+* sets sail on *The Falling Star* with its creative team.

Matt Chapman

There aren't many of us who can look back on the artifacts from our teenage years and view them with anything more than a sense of nostalgic fondness. Very rarely will something we created in our teens be the influence for a major new roleplaying accessory. Unless you're Chris Perkins, DM to the stars and Senior Producer at Wizards of the Coast, whose brilliance shone through even when he was nineteen.

"When I was a teenager, I drew an



An early mockup of The Falling Star. (Select to view)

isometric map of *The Falling Star* sailing ship for my home D&D campaign. It was one of the few hand-drawn maps I'd kept over the years because it was so versatile and reusable. I never could have imagined it might show up in other peoples' campaigns nor that it would serve as the inspiration for a ship model," he says when *Dragon+* asks about the vessel from his youth.

Design inspirations from real life ships. (Select to view)

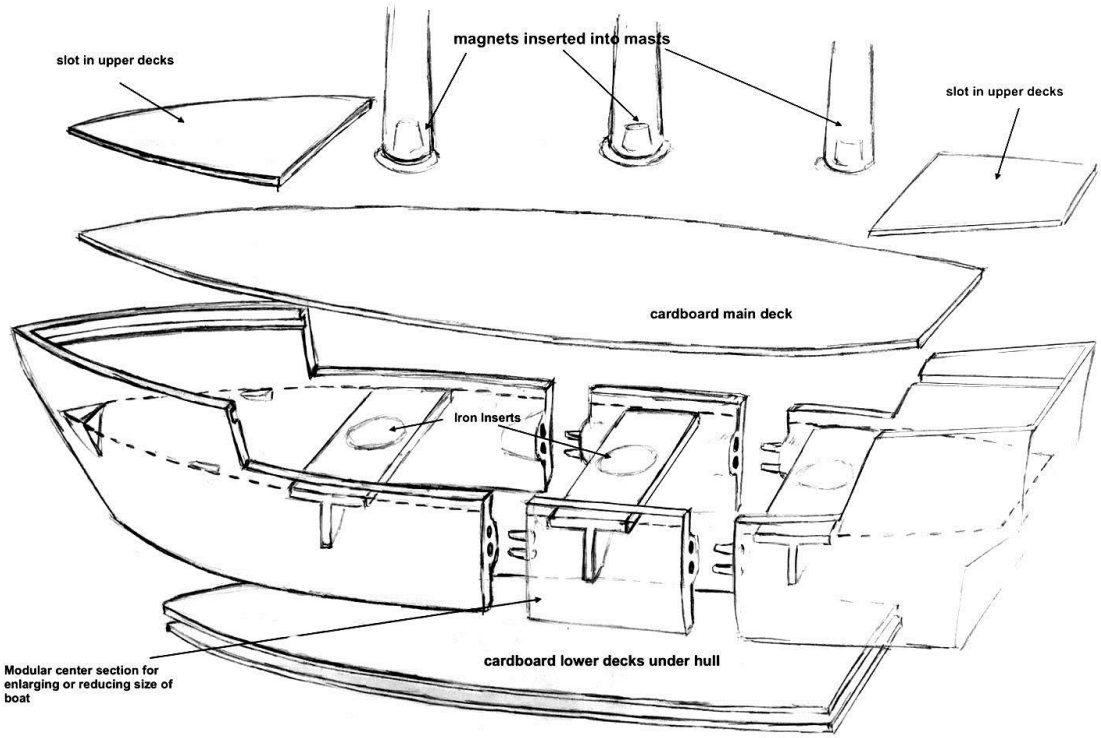
"I hope it's really cool for Chris to see this brought to life," adds Arthur Wright, DM for *Rollout* on the UpUpDownDown channel who got his hands on one of the earliest models and will be using it in his game. "I have lots of Dungeons & Dragons things in my head but to have something become a physical object that you can share with others is amazing.

"I play in a game with a DM who uses a lot of 3D terrain and I can tell you it adds a whole other level to D&D. I'm a total convert and now believe playing with minis and 3D models adds so much fun and enjoyment. Once players get their hands on *The Falling Star* they are going to *want* it."

Ship Shape

Before plundering the mind of nineteen-year-old Perkins, WizKids thought long and hard about the kind of ship it wanted to construct. The overriding driving force behind the project was that the idea itself was cool.

"Like our trophy plaques, unpainted minis, and many other items in our product pipeline, *The Falling Star* started with the notion: 'Wouldn't it be cool if…?' At that phase of the project we ignore many of the metrics other companies use to determine if a product is viable—such as costs and market size—and go with intuition. There are a lot of good ideas on cutting room floors that simply needed an internal champion willing to take a chance and solve problems rather than surrender to the numbers," says Justin Ziran, President of WizKids.



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"I always liked set pieces that looked good *and* played well." Pre-built set pieces can tend to fall into two distinct categories, according to Justin: either incredibly accurate to the exclusion of playability; or incredibly useful but may lose the aesthetic and that sense of immersion. "We tried to thread that needle and do both."

WizKids' team began by looking at ships from varying eras to try and identify a layout that would satisfy its most important criteria. They were aware that story is everything in D&D, so wanted the vessel to be a worthy location to provide that interactive storytelling. This unique approach to ship design saw *The Falling Star* characterized as a tavern on the high seas.

The team also knew that the ship had to be suitable for D&D play, so the surfaces had to be big enough for minis to move around comfortably while also being manageable enough to manufacture at a reasonable price. And they didn't want the aesthetic of the boat to be reliant on accoutrements such as sails or rigging.

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"We had to balance visual aesthetic against usability, which is surprisingly hard and resulted in many redoes," says Ziran. "That's partly because the ship had to accommodate multi-level play. The D&D version of the prime directive is ' *Never* split the party.' Ironically this happens regularly in games and especially when players are in confined spaces like a boat, so we wanted to embrace this mode of play and try to optimize for it. We needed DMs to be able to quickly and easily manage an encounter below deck in view of the other players, encouraging multi-deck play in a way that didn't require a secret conference between DM and the renegade player as that creates 'un-fun' moments for the other players."

Fallen Angels

Having carried out extensive research, WizKids eventually ran into a dead end when it came to ship designs. Some were too piratey, some too British, others too stylized, and some were defined by theirs sails, rigging, and rope ladders and didn't look right without them.

"We were at an impasse and talked through the issues with Wizards of the Coast. When they came back with *The Falling Star* from their library, we were thrilled," says Chas Delong, Director of Production at WizKids.

"We were pursuing a trade-off strategy between look and usability,

and as we cycled through classic ship designs we realized that rigging and masts just got in the way of actually playing with your minis. Some of the ships we tried were so cramped that we knocked over minis and/or the ship, which is a miserable experience in terms of play."

To get around this issue the design team started trimming rigging, sails and any other "do-dads" from its prototypes. What they quickly realized was that certain ships retained their awesomeness without all the hassle of dodging rope ladders, deployed sails, and rigging.

"We literally cut off rigging, ladders, and do-dads until we had a playable piece where you could reach in and move your mini without knocking over the ship. Long story short: the masts on our *Falling Star*model are now detachable so you can get to your minis and have full access to the play surface," continues Delong.

"Obviously we couldn't do away with masts completely because of the visuals, strategy, and roleplaying elements they bring to an encounter. We couldn't deprive D&D players of such a heroic perch as the crow's nest to place an archer or wizard and reign terror down on marauders."

Pile of discarded do-dads.

In order to minimize the disruption of two eleven-inch poles begging to get caught on a sleeve or knocked aside by an arm, the design opted for a magnetized attachment that would gracefully fall without upsetting the entire ship if caught accidentally. These were also easily removable to give players full access to the main deck.

"The crow's nest was another problem area," admits Delong. "To accommodate a medium-sized humanoid it needed to be almost three-inches in diameter. When we mocked that up it looked silly, top heavy and ruined the look we were trying to achieve. Instead we opted for the more streamlined approach of a simple one-inch by one-inch platform. This creates the utility without sacrificing the usability

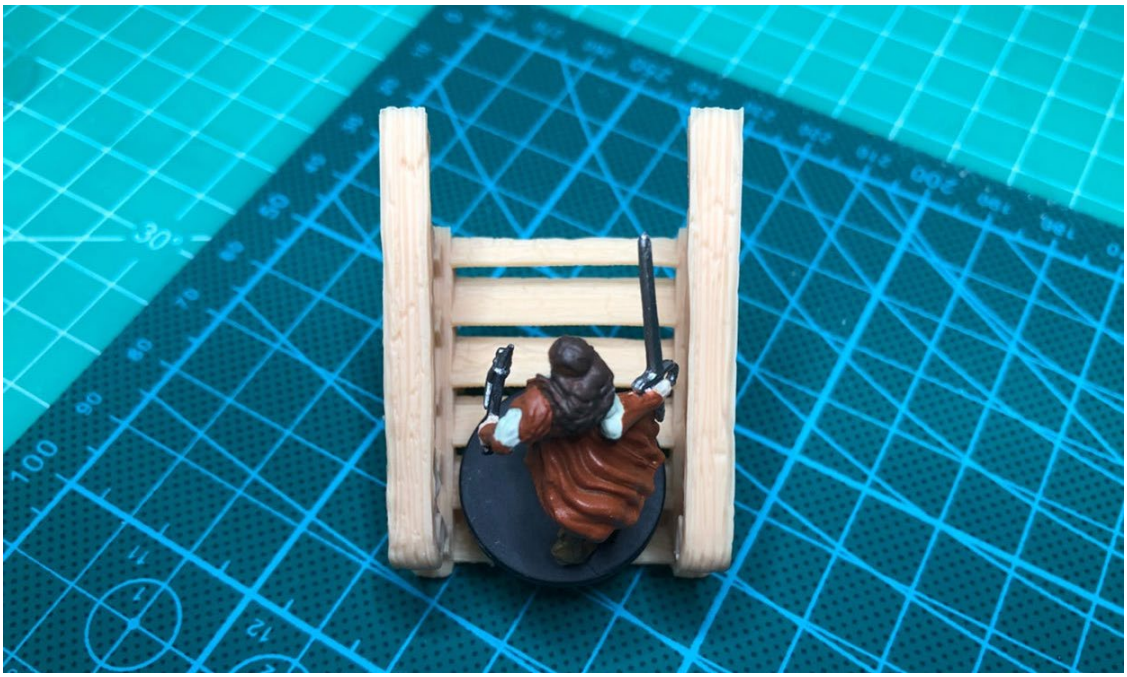
or immersion."

As for the ship's masthead, early design ideas included a mermaid and a warrior atop a charging horse before the final option was chosen.

"We had two or three options and we experimented with a few sizes," says Ty Spurlock from WizKids' Digital Sculpting Team. "In the end we opted for the dragon because… it's a dragon."

Minis Maxed

Another crucial feature was the ability to use miniatures to bring these sea-going adventures to life. A lot of work went into making their interaction with the ship as realistic as possible.



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"One thing we discovered during testing was that a standard 25mm medium base didn't fit between the handrails on the stairs," says Randy Bernard, who worked on *The Falling Star*'s R&D and was part of the Digital Sculpting Team. "Going back to our objective of supporting the story telling, we envisioned a swashbuckler wanting to fight on the handrails or stairs. So we not only widened the stairs, we made sure the gaps between the stair treads would allow a standard 25mm base from our pre-painted lines or the thinner base from our unpainted lines to be pushed in. "We also adjusted the angle of the stairs so that you could approximate their distance to be around two-inches or ten-feet in game, making the calculation of movement up the stairs a little easier."

Those minis weren't the only ones to be matched to the ship—if you can describe WizKids' Kraken as a "mini".

The Kraken figure perfectly matches the ship's scale. (Select to view)

“When the Kraken figure was first announced we knew we would also be creating a ship, so we wanted to make sure both the creature itself and the rowboat that came with that set would match this product,” says Bryan Kinsella, COO at WizKids.”You’ll notice that the tentacles included with the Kraken are perfectly sized to work with *The Falling Star*.”

Ziran says that sense of integration will carry through to future WizKids products: “As we design other elements for high seas adventures you can assume we will design them for, and test them with, *The Falling Star* when it is reasonable to do so.”

Hands On

Perkins describes seeing the ship from his youth brought to life and knowing people will get to experience it as “gratifying”: “I don’t keep a lot of things from my past so it was fun to see something I created as a teenager inspire something awesome. Seeing other people get to use the ship will make me so happy.”

He’ll soon be able to see it in action in live-stream games as DMs and parties physically get their hands on *The Falling Star*. One of the first campaigns to incorporate it is *Rollout* on the UpUpDownDown channel. DM Wright is already plotting how to use the model in his campaign and while not wanting to give too much away ahead of filming season two, we can reveal that the professional wrestlers who

make up his gaming group can expect pirates (of a sort) and possibly some “abduction”. Yo ho ho indeed.

Having been one of the very first people to get to unbox *The Falling Star* he’s in a unique position to describe its appeal.

“My first thought when I opened this was, ‘ *Wow*, this thing is massive!’ Of course I knew it would have to be big because the idea is to have battles on board with miniatures, but it caught me off guard because it was even bigger than I expected,” he tells *Dragon+*.

“The ship is made of hard plastic and feels really sturdy. Its below deck areas are tactical one-inch maps that detach from the bottom of the ship and can be placed next to it to offer multi-level combat. I think that will give a great feel to encounters and battles.”

“There’s plenty of room to have battles on deck or below, as well as placing minis in the crow’s nest to toss spells at the enemies below. Or should that be aarakocra’s nest, or maybe an aarakocra in the crow’s nest… this is getting confusing…”

Wright confirms that WizKids also sent him “a bunch of cool minis” and other terrain models to enhance the ship and he’ll be making use of those in his campaign.

“My wife, friends, and I are gathering every Thursday night until we shoot *Rollout* season two to paint these minis. My wife Julie particularly liked painting the cages that WizKids sent and has turned two of them into ‘force’ cages, which gives me what I need to contain this group of characters.”

(Select to view)

All of which is pretty impressive given that it's based on something a young DM thought up for a home game many moons ago. We were hoping to be able to publish Perkins' original map and really tap into that nostalgia but unfortunately it has been lost to the mists of time.

"What became of it I don't know," he says. "But cartographer Mike Schley has created a new map of the vessel and he has a long tradition of making my maps look beautiful."

Should we expect more major launches based on blasts from the pasts from teen Perkins? "More than anything, seeing this ship brought to life makes me regret not hanging onto other relics of my early experiences as a Dungeon Master," he says.

***The Fallen Star* from WizKids is on sale from February 2019. Season one of *Rollout* on the UpUpDownDown channel is available now and the second season airs early in 2019.**

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Fiction: Raven’s Reckoning

Our tale of Braya continues as the young thief’s search for Waterdeep’s Vault of Dragons takes a new turn. But Braya soon discovers she’s not the only one in the hunt for Waterdeep's Vault of Dragons. As everyone else continues their own search...

by Mark Price & David Roomes

Dry or sweet? A wrong answer at this point and the heist would be over. Braya was sure of it.”

“Dry,” she replied. ” *Very* dry. If that’s your choice, you’ll appreciate savory notes of black currant, a classic, full bodied feel, and a sharp finish.”

She bowed with a rehearsed flourish and forced her smile at the two rival crime bosses sitting across from each other. Both watched her carefully.

The first: an elven male, much taller than Braya had heard, moved a hand to his chin as if making a show of considering her words. She knew him only by his street pejorative, *Sneer*: an ambitious crime boss in Waterdeep’s Trades Ward, well-connected and ruthless, and tonight flanked by muscle—the formidable half-orc that towered behind him. Sneer’s real name, however, was known but to a mysterious few.

“Excellent,” Sneer nodded, “House Amaris accepts.” Braya secretly exhaled with relief.

He then looked across the table to his rival. "And what of you, Scar? Does Clan Roardun agree to the offering? Or is the choice too aggressive for dwarven palettes?"

Scar actually *was* the dwarf's name, and a vein in his temple noticeably pulsed. An outer city crime boss on the rise, he was known for his fiery disposition. Braya did her best not to stare at the jagged white birthmark that ran down the side of his face. As she expected, Scar brought his own bodyguard, a human female of imposing posture whose hand inched closer to her scabbard. An ex-military officer, Braya guessed.

"Clan Roardun accepts," said Scar through tightly clenched teeth. Now it was Braya's turn.

"Then as a fully registered Steward of the Vintners, Distillers and Brewers Guild…" a forgery she had bribed dearly to set up, "I will prepare the decanting and return shortly with the wine."

With that, the young thief turned and began weaving through the tables toward the dance floor. At the edge of the dining area she passed the central fountain, which had changed both its color and melody. Streams of red and blue water danced playfully to a lively tune, one written specifically for the occasion. She flanked the edge of the crowded dance floor and pushed through countless spectators who stood to watch. Posh nobles, fawning merchants and all manner of the privileged were dressed in their finest for the Lliira's Night celebration, all looking to see and be seen, eager to dance and preen and gossip.

Braya had a job to do. Nearing the kitchen, she dodged a servant carrying an enormous platter of culinary delights and ducked into the wine cellar. She rummaged around for a while and found what she was looking for, a slender dark bottle with a label yellowed from age. Beneath the silhouette of a bird were the words, "Raven's Reckoning, 1351 DR". One of just two bottles left.

Emerging from the cellar, Braya spotted her partner, Grudal, in the shadows to the side of the hall. She put the bottle under her arm and approached the young man.

Grudal stood stooped behind a dessert cart as if trying to hide his considerable frame from sight. She ignored the radiance of color from the desserts displayed on the cart and moved around to his side. His lips glistened with honey. Braya glanced at the cart and noticed several empty plates where honeyed brittle cakes should have been. She caught his eye and Grudal shrugged with a weak smile.

"I eat when I'm nervous," he mumbled.

"You're nervous? I just looked two major crime bosses in the eye. They need the wine to consummate the trade, complete with all the fancy words."

"So they bought it?"

She nodded. "They went dry instead of sweet. I prepared for both. For weeks. And when this is over the concept of wine is dead to me. How're the fireworks?"

"Ready to go," Grudal nodded towards the courtyard where an impressive arsenal of magically enhanced, combustible baubles was strategically placed, waiting for the bell to toll the hour.

"Great," she pulled out the bottle with a dexterous panache. "And now… a little spike, a distraction, some nimble finger work and we're out the door with the key before anyone knows what's happened."

"Uh, right…" Grudal said, shoving a candied fig in his mouth.

"Speaking of which, hand over the potion."

The young man turned pale. "W-well…" he began with a stutter.

Braya leveled a stern gaze at him that made him wither. "Grudal, what did you do?" She grabbed his arm. "Where *is* it?"

He shrugged helplessly. "I'm sorry, Braya, I had to improvise. There was a pack of guards at the rear entrance and I couldn't get past them. I managed to spike their drinks and the stuff worked, but…"

She squeezed his arm harder. "How much did you use?"

He pulled out a small vial from his jacket pocket. His voice was barely a whisper. "All of it.…"

She yanked the empty vial out of his hand. The stopper was in place, but she could smell the faint lavender scent from the scant drop of purple liquid remaining. Not nearly enough.

"This stuff's expensive and, what was it? Oh, that's right, *critical!*" she said, shaking the vial at him. She angrily shoved it in her pocket, muttering a string of descriptive curses beneath her breath. "I needed that potion to get them groggy and dull their wits. It was the lynch pin of the whole plan!"

She stopped abruptly and looked around the room. "Alright, fine… so we adapt. We still have our distraction. As long as those fireworks go off in *exactly* twenty minutes—"

A sudden sequence of bangs and pops gave way to a cacophony of explosions. A gasp of delight erupted from the guests as a riot of light and color flashed across the walls of the courtyard.

Braya's mouth hung agape as she witnessed the spectacle.

A trio of drunken nobles staggered back from the display stand as the massive bloom of fireworks erupted around them. "I told you my pipe could light the wick!" one of them slurred. A panicked event manager bolted into the garden with a small entourage of staff scurrying closely behind.

The two thieves eyed each other with exasperation as guests burst into tumultuous applause.

Indeed, there was much excitement in the air. Waterdeep had been abuzz throughout the holiday about a rumored cache of gold, larger than even the most extravagant noble could spend in a lifetime. Every gang in the underworld seemed to have their own angle on it. Hidden somewhere in the city, just waiting for someone with the right plan and the right skills to find it and pull off the heist of a generation.

The murder of her beloved mentor, Tyben, had shown Braya what some people might do to claim such a prize. She had decided to move forward. It seemed wrong not to.

"We won't get another chance like this," said Braya. "Not everyone knows the value of that key. It's supposed to unlock a whole series of tunnels. It gets us to the next step. Without it, we're finished." Grudal nodded in agreement, the crumbs from a sugared lemon scone falling from his lips.

Braya looked across the floor at the two crime bosses in awkward, stilted conversation. One of them had the key on his person, right this second. It was so close. But which one?

"Even if we can't get the key tonight," said Braya, "we'll witness the exchange and see who has it, and who walks out with it. Then we try something else. Another night, another plan."

She reached out to correct the purple attendant's sash he'd acquired as part of his disguise. "Oh, and the sash goes on the right, not the left. Stay here."

Swaddling the bottle of Raven's Reckoning in a fine serving cloth, she grabbed a pair of goblets that were tucked on the tray's lower shelf, took a deep breath, and marched back toward the dining area.

Braya's mind was racing as she skirted the edge of the dance floor. Fine lords and ladies spun around in a blur of colorful ruffles and sparkling jewels. They all looked like peacocks to her, or at least what she'd imagined to be peacocks. Fate seemed content to play games, doling out wealth and poverty based on the whim of birth.

Well, not today. Today, she was changing the rules.

She paused next to the fountain at the edge of the dining area and looked around for anything that might help her. One of the patrons sitting a few tables away caught her eye. He was a broad bearded man with blazing red hair and a crooked nose. It took a moment for her to realize she knew him. He had chased her last month when she tried to rob the upscale gambling den he ran. A fundraiser for this very project.

Braya was able to lose him easily enough then, but it wasn't until later she learned the den was owned by agents of Xanathar, Waterdeep's most notoriously volatile criminal mind. She had cursed herself for not doing better research—an uncharacteristic mistake she

vowed not to repeat. The further away from the paranoid beholder boss's many eyes she remained, the better.

Tonight, there was no reason to believe her disguise wasn't holding up (truly amazing what a simple bath and haircut could do) but still… if *one* agent was here… she glanced around the ballroom with growing concern.

Her worry was soon justified. Across the room a pale skinned woman and a dour-looking man sat glancing over at Sneer and Scar. They were also agents, she was positive. But how many more were watching them from the crowd?

Braya saw Sneer notice her hovering at the edge of the dining area and willed herself forward, unable to linger any longer. She approached the table, eyes dashing about the room, face to face to face: the server in the corner, the short man by the coat rack, the bartender across the room. All of them Xanathar loyalists, all of them keeping a discreet eye on Sneer and Scar—and now, her…

Then Braya chanced upon an alarming sight. In the far back corner at a private booth she caught a glimpse of a stocky woman brushing back fringes of wild, bright grey hair.

It had to be Verruda, an upcoming but feared Xanathar lieutenant. And just like that the evening had gone from cautious concern to immediate threat.

Sneer and Scar both looked up as Braya arrived at the table. A chill ran down Braya's spine as she felt the weight of the agents' eyes on her next move, almost as if the infamous (and, it was rumored, insane) beholder was in the room itself. The rivals seemed not to have noticed the agents yet. She inhaled a moment to steady herself, and began reciting from memory.

"I present to you this bottle of Raven's Reckoning 1351. By Honor of the Vintners, Distillers, and Brewers Guild, may this wine bless your meeting and bestow trust so that tonight, Lliira's Night, you may benefit from this trade and know the joy of fellowship."

With a practiced bow, she produced the pair of gold-rimmed crystalline goblets and set them on the table. She held the bottle aloft,

then thrust a long steel corkscrew into its waxed closure, deftly pulling out the cork. Sneer curled a lip in what might have been a smile. Scar merely grunted and gave a nod.

"If you would care to inspect the offering?" She handed the open bottle to Scar, who held it awkwardly and gave a glare before sliding it across the table. Sneer took the vessel and gingerly turned it around, examining the faded yellow label with a raised eyebrow.

Then, unexpectedly, he turned the bottle over to his half-orc bodyguard, who accepted it warily. Braya did her best to ignore for now the hidden scrutiny of their audience.

"Just think," Sneer said to his brute, "that little bottle is worth more than you earned all last year." The brute had no response other than a nervous nod.

Sneer then locked a smirk back to his rival. "I'm sure you can relate."

Scar's officer winced at the insult, watching her boss visibly struggle to maintain his composure, a volcano close to eruption.

Before the dwarf could respond, however, the half-orc suddenly fumbled the bottle. To Braya's vast and immediate relief, he somehow managed to recover and catch it at the neck with both hands. Not even a spill, by some unseen miracle.

Braya stepped in, trying to conceal the shaking of her hands. "It's alright," she said, rescuing the bottle and looking up just in time to notice one of Xanathar's thugs give a nod and gesture to Verruda in the back. Verruda leaned forward ever so slightly, her eyes never leaving the young thief.

"Enough!" Scar snapped, "Are you here to talk, or to trade?"

Sneer gave Braya a dismissive wave. "Proceed, then."

It felt as if the entire underworld of Waterdeep was watching as she carefully poured the wine and positioned each goblet in front of the two men.

With a slow nod, Sneer pulled out a velvet pouch and withdrew a sparkling green gem, holding it up to the light. Scar thrust a meaty

hand into his surcoat and withdrew a heavy, ornate bronze key. He grunted and unceremoniously dropped it onto the table.

And there it was, right in front of her.

But then Braya saw Verruda give a signal, and several agents at other tables rose to their feet and advanced. Sneer and Scar, oblivious, raised their goblets. And though the half-orc was similarly unaware, the officer cocked her head to the side, noticing something amiss.

Braya had less than seconds. Her thoughts darted across the room like lightning: *The ballroom, the table, the wine, the–*

The agents were nearly upon them. The rivals brought the wine to their lips…

"Do something!" she felt her mind screaming.

Almost of its own accord, her hand shot out and *slapped* the goblet out of Scar's hand, sending wine everywhere as the projectile loudly clattered across the floor. Everyone at the table gasped. The agents of Xanathar froze in place. From across the room, a half-bitten custard tart fell from Grudal's mouth.

But in that exact moment, no one was more surprised than Braya.

Shit. What did I just do?

"Well then," she could remember old Tyben saying in a time like this, "To hell with the plan…"

"ASSASSIN!" Braya shouted before anyone could react, and lunged at the half-orc, hurling the full weight of herself directly into the henchman's midsection. It was like tackling a stone wall. The brute grappled and easily held her as she struggled against him.

"Scar!" she called out, "He was trying to poison you! Listen to me!" Scar stood up with alarm as his officer drew a curved blade.

Sneer bolted upright as well. "This is preposterous! We came here in good faith!"

"I saw!" Braya protested, "It's in his vest pocket!"

"The *insult*…!" Sneer declared, his face growing red with outrage. "Dimitri! Empty your pocket this instant! House Amaris has *nothing* to hide."

The brute reluctantly let go of Braya and began to rummage through his vest pocket.

"And you!" he pointed an accusing finger at Braya, "The guild will hear of your blatant disrespect for tradition! You'll be scrubbing out the… the…" Sneer's voice faltered as everyone's attention shifted to Dimitri.

With a confused look on his face, the brute slowly held out his hand to reveal the contents of his pocket: some sand, a mouse skeleton, a few copper nibs, and… a nearly empty vial.

Braya snatched the vial out of his hand and tossed it to Scar. Midair, it was intercepted by his officer, who uncorked it and sniffed at the drop of purple liquid therein.

"Three Sheets," the officer confirmed. "A new and subtle strain of sleep potion that– "

"I *know* what it does!" Scar yelled, drawing a sturdy blade and pointing it directly at Sneer.

"But that was planted!" Sneer exclaimed, taking a step back. "Don't be stupid!"

"Never cross a dwarf!" bellowed Scar as he hurled his goblet at Sneer. The crystal struck Sneer's forehead and shattered, leaving bloody trails across his face. The elf staggered backward and fell to his knees, dropping the gem out of sight.

Dmitri upended the table with a roar, sending the key flying as he charged towards Scar and his officer while the agents of Xanathar ran toward the fray. Chaos exploded as everyone was on their feet and moving. Bystanders scrambled to get out of the way as the three groups collided with a thunderclap of force.

Braya's eyes widened with alarm as she leapt towards the key, which bounced on the decorative tile floor and skittered in the direction of the approaching agents. Her red-bearded friend and an agent with a

pockmarked face also lunged at the prize, but Braya was a half-second faster. She swept the key off the floor, tucked into a roll, and came up quickly to her feet.

She felt an iron grip on her shoulder. Thinking fast, she snatched up a plate from the table next to her and drove it into red beard's throat. Coughing violently, he released his grip and fell back, straight into the pockmarked man. Wasting no time, she vaulted over a table and sprinted through the calamity with nearly a dozen shouting agents converging around her.

As she neared the fountain, she spotted Grudal, who charged in her direction while pushing his dessert cart as a battering ram. "Improvise!" she gasped.

Grudal nodded and altered his path. "You got it!" With a heave, the youngster lifted the heavy cart above his shoulders as fine porcelain crashed to the floor. Then, with a running start, he hurled it straight at her pursuers.

He missed.

With a deafening crash the cart hit the fountain, plowing through precarious marble and flinging fractured masonry across the floor. All nearby crouched for cover. The wounded fountain began vomiting blasts of colorful water and perfumed oils, thrashing about like a dying animal and covering the dance floor with slippery fluids.

Agents and guests alike lost their footing on the slick surface as Braya half-ran, half-slithered through her remaining assailants and across the floor to join Grudal. The two raced their way to the kitchen with a narrow head start on the pandemonium left in their wake.

They burst through the kitchen doorway and immediately stumbled upon a wall of servants loading trays of appetizers, all startled at the sight of Braya's torn steward's smock and completely bewildered at the commotion outside. A hush settled among the group.

Grudal looked at her. "So what do we– "

"PEOPLE, THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE!" she blurted, clapping her hands to get everyone's attention. "You hear them, they're *rioting* out

there! The soup course is late! Our guests need *soup*!"

"But it's not time for…" a servant stammered.

"NO EXCUSES! EVERYTHING GOES OUT! NOW! NOW! NOW!" Braya continued to yell and jab towards the door until the entire wait staff was sufficiently intimidated into carrying trays of piping hot soup through the narrow doorway—and right into the path of the approaching agents.

Through the multitude of shattering bowls and surprised yelps, she nodded to Grudal, "Let's go. No, wait…!"

On a moment's inspiration, Braya bounded across the kitchen to the wine cellar and seized one final item: the last remaining bottle of Raven's Reckoning 1351.

"Sorry, I just have to see what all the fuss is about…" she said to Grudal as she led him past stunned cooks on the line and through the prep area.

"They'll be through here in seconds," he warned.

"Relax," Braya said. "We're so far from the plan that we're back *to* the plan." She threw open a heavily hinged panel on the wall, revealing a garbage-slicked chute leading to darkness. "This leads to a maze of sewers."

"That you know your way around, right?"

Braya flashed a quick smile before leaping into the chute.

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Disarray and confusion reigned in the ballroom as House Amaris and Clan Roardun continued to fight, the agents of Xanathar began to dissipate into the flustered crowd, and estate security struggled to make sense of what was happening.

Through the excitement, Verruda stood calmly. The red-bearded agent whispered in her ear as her eyes remained fixed past the kitchen door. A slight smile formed on her lips. Someone would pay her

handsomely to learn more of the resourceful young thief fleeing the scene. Someone with many eyes.

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Hours later and far from the prying eyes of any competitors, Braya and Grudal at last reclined in a private room at a modest inn in the Dock Ward. The warmth from the fireplace was especially rewarding, given they were soaking wet from the sewers and thoroughly exhausted. She studied the key in her hand.

"We're still in the hunt," Braya said with a weary but proud smile. "Who knows where it will go. But today, at least, we made our own fate."

Grudal returned the smile. "Are you going to drink that or what?"

She held the bottle against the glow of the flickering light. "Some classic, full-bodied goodness in honor of our sharp finish? You're damned right I am."

Braya opened the bottle with the corkscrew, much less showy this time, and nodded a toast to her friend. She then drank deeply from the ancient bottle.

As the wine met her throat, her eyes widened with surprise at the taste. She checked the label again, to make sure she'd grabbed the right one. Indeed, she had.

And despite herself she burst into a full, unforced laughter that would carry throughout the evening.

It was very, *very* sweet.

Check back in Dragon+ 20 for more from Braya in her first tale: Secrets of the Deep!

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Streaming Highlights

This issue we highlight Spanish language gaming and a livestream game based on a shiny platinum box set. Excelente!

Fistful of Platinum

Join Lindsey Rode (human rogue Agnus Copper), Michael Konas (goliath cleric Otter Thrud), Jennifer Patrick (half-orc fighter Astrid), Trisha Kosloski (gnome bard Magpie) and Jessie Swinton (tiefling warlock Marcellus) as they enjoy the limited-edition swag that can be found inside Beadle & Grimm's Platinum Edition box set for *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*.

"In *Fistful of Platinum* we follow our heroes as they discover their heritage: what was left for them in Waterdeep, what they left behind, and what destiny has in store for them," says DM Alan Patrick.

"They'll have to determine which way to go when the sun gets low and everything becomes a shade of grey. Along the way they'll meet

friends, foes, and all manner of cohorts and ne'er-do-wells in between!"

Fistful of Platinum streams from Saturday 15, December from 9AM-1PM PT on the official D&D Twitch channel .

Una Partida Más: Trece Albas

UX Designer and extraordinary DM/narrator Mario Ortegón brings Dungeons & Dragons to Spanish-speaking players and audiences under his umbrella gaming brand *Una Partida Más* (*One More Game*) on his Twitch channel. Originally from Mexico, Ortegón first began playing D&D via online forums and text messaging after seeing the Dungeons & Dragons live-action movie. But you might know him better as @elwarius…

"That was the name of my first D&D character a long time ago. He was a human wizard," Ortegón says. "I was using the name Wario because my name is Mario and I thought I was being clever. Later I found out there was a gaming character called that and my DM said you can't be called Wario, that's ridiculous. So I decided to be Warius."

Clerical Error

"When an old adventurer dies he leaves his fortune not just to his grandson but tied to the Dungsweepers Guild. Now that grandson is mixed up with a crew who are all just trying to make a difference in Waterdeep!" says Dungeon Master Lauren "OboeCrazy" Urban, describing a hugely entertaining show that features players Greg Tito, Trick Jarrett, Michelle Sutterfield, Meris Mullaley, and Demitrios Feredinos. And you can hear more from Tito and Urban on roleplaying blind cleric Faben on page ten of this issue.

Clerical Error recently finished its season on the official Dungeons & Dragons Twitch channel and you can find the full playlist here .

D&D Beyond

No-one around to play D&D? Nothing good on TV or tablet? Banish that holiday funk by accessing more video goodies than Santa could watch on the 364 days he's got his feet up. We heartily recommend

the new livestream *Heroes of Vale* with DM Mike Mearls, plus there's plenty to sample in the Homebrew section of the website to enhance your games, including holiday treats like Krampus' Snow Globe.

D&D Beyond is the official digital toolset for Dungeons & Dragons fifth edition and its extensive video output can be accessed here . *Heroes of Vale* streams on Wednesdays from 2-4PM PT on the official D&D Beyond Twitch channel .

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D&D Toons: City Under Ooze

Our cartoon walkthrough tours a city with an ooze problem. Plus, our latest round of doodles!

(Select to view)

For this year's D&D Extra Life adventure we created formal maps for DMs and players to use (one of which you can find in the Maps section of this issue). At the same time, we also wanted to take a more lighthearted look at the adventure locations—and who better to turn to than artist Jason Thompson?

From the adventure description:

The city of Daoine Gloine has long been thought of as mere legend—just another strange tale from the already strange Barrier Peaks. Occasionally, travelers would return from the mountains with wild claims of having been lost in the peaks and finding the city by accident. And though none of these visitors could produce a full map

showing the route they took, their stories all shared a common element—that Daoine Gloine was populated by creatures made of living glass, tended to by kenku in love with those creatures' shining beauty. These occasional tales drove more explorers—including Kwalish's own expedition—to seek out the route to Daoine Gloine and learn the truth of who dwelled there.

As always, our thanks to Jason in concepting our latest walkthrough map. Please keep in mind that the following contains spoilers, so examine with care!

[Button: Download; https://media.wizards.com/2018/dnd/downloads/DaoineGloinePlayersHandout.jpg; small; Color;]

About the Artist
Comic artist, author and illustrator Jason Thompson currently runs a Monday night gaming group in San Francisco. His works include the Eisner-nominated *Manga: The Complete Guide, King of RPGs, H.P. Lovecraft's The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, and the tabletop game *Mangaka: The Fast & Furious Game of Drawing Comics.* His favorite things to draw are landscapes, plants, reptiles and amphibians.

Dungeons and Doodles
It's a double dose of doodles! Our latest two *Dungeons & Doodles* episodes have aired! In September, Stan!, Matt Warren, and Maxx Marshall joined our *Dragon+* livestream (and all three of those artists also contributed to the Extra Life adventure). The topics we asked them to draw?

DRUIDS GONE WILD SHAPE:
Normally, *wild shape* lets druids transform into any beast that they've seen. What if it was any beast they could imagine? Draw an unusual or unfortunate creature that a very imaginative druid might transform into.

CALLOO CALLAY! OH FRABJOUS DAY!:
It's the happiest day in this _____'s life! What is it that's making them so happy?

WHO THOUGHT THAT WAS A GOOD IDEA?:
Artisans and craftspeople can be very single-minded folk, pursuing a concept or a design regardless of its practicality or even functionality. Their very passion is often enough to imbue these creations with a spark of magic, and soon the world has a new artifact or wondrous item for which no one has any practical use. Draw a completely useless magic item.

ODD COUPLES:
Housing is getting more expensive, and dungeon delving doesn't provide a regular paycheck, so sometimes you just have to take in a roommate. Show us what life would be like for these unlikely pairings.

And their finished pieces—enjoy!

DOWNLOAD DUNGEONS AND DOODLES

And then in October, Stan!, Richard Whitters, and Adam Lee joined the livestream. The topics we asked them to draw?

(Select to view)

WITH ALLIES LIKE THESE, WHO NEEDS ENEMIES?:
Avalon Hill has just released the *Axis & Allies & Zombies* board game. What other *Axis & Allies* games should be in development?

HALLOWEEN:
It's that time of the year again when kids dress up as scary monsters. And in Waterdeep they celebrate Fey Day, when the rich throw feasts and the poorer folks don costumes of their own making. What costumes would the adventurers and monsters of D&D don to celebrate?

"EH" D&D:
D&D is popular all around the world—including our neighbor to the north, Canada. We've even accepted such Canadians in our midst as Richard Whitters (and Tyler Jacobson)! In honor of Richard's

heritage, draw a Canadian version of a _____.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
We streamed during Stan!'s birthday (or thereabouts) and wanted to see how other denizens of D&D might celebrate. Draw what a birthday party would look like for a _____. What kind of present would they receive? What kind of present would they give? What party games would they play? What guests would they invite?

And their finished pieces—enjoy!

DOWNLOAD DUNGEONS AND DOODLES: OCTOBER

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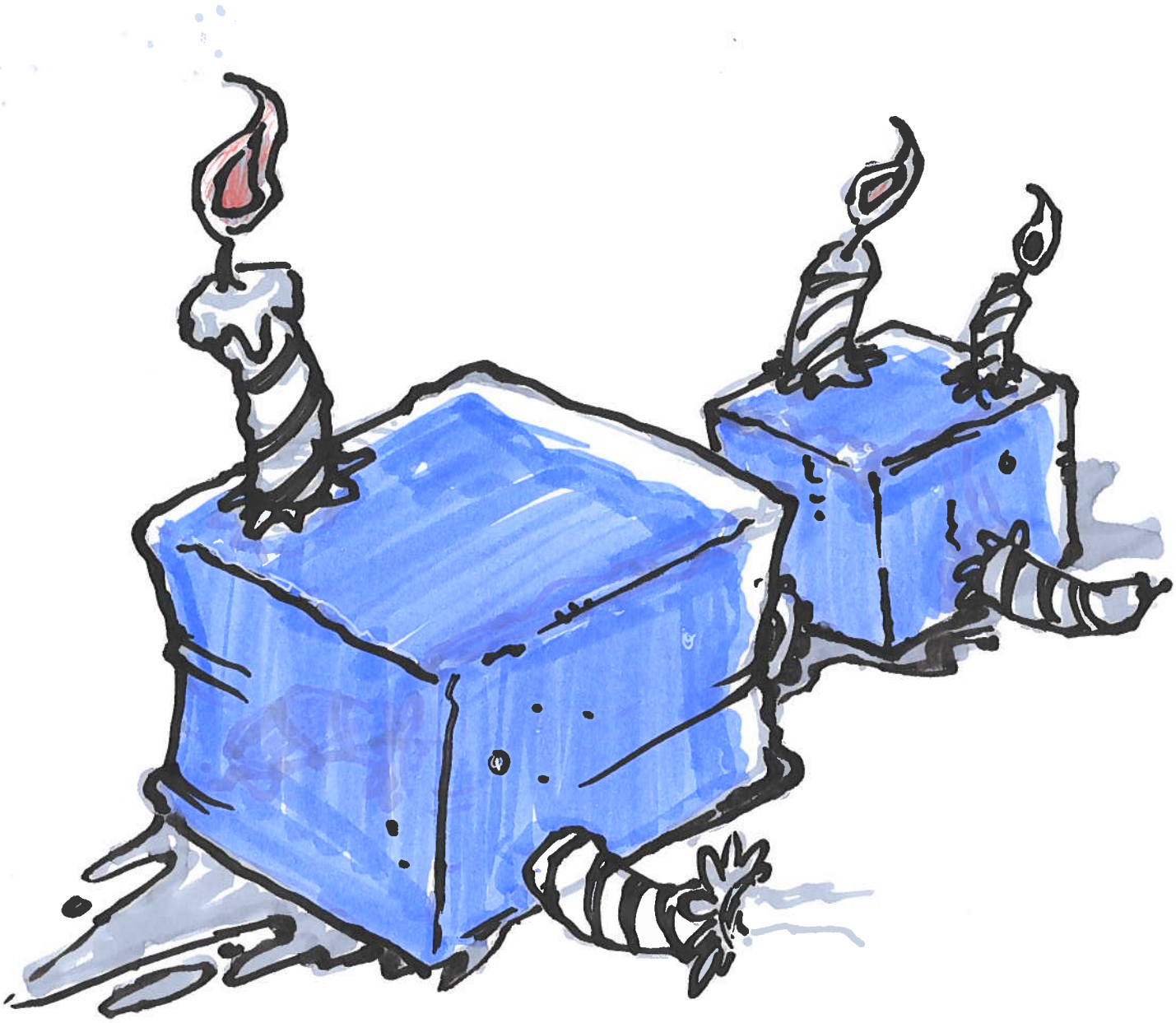

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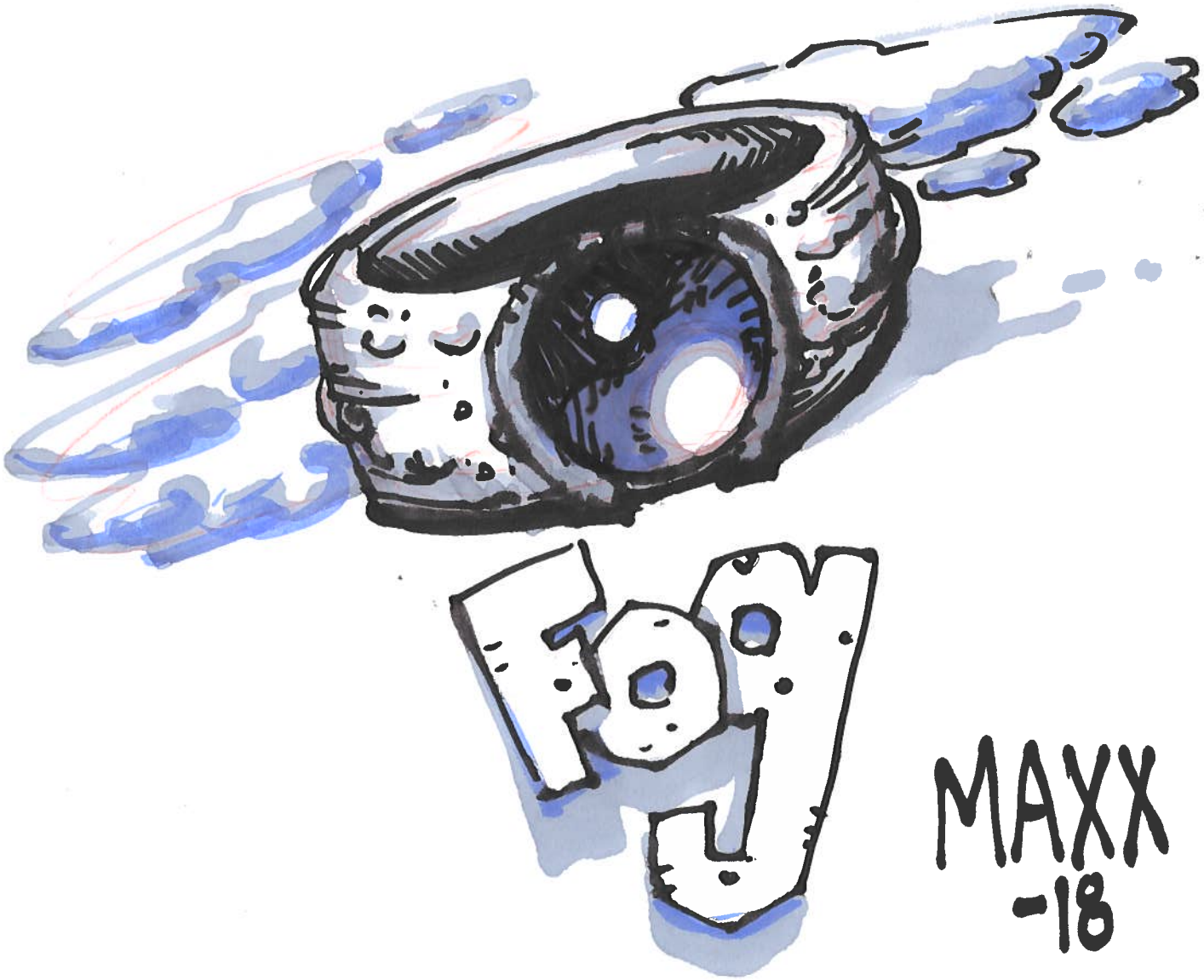
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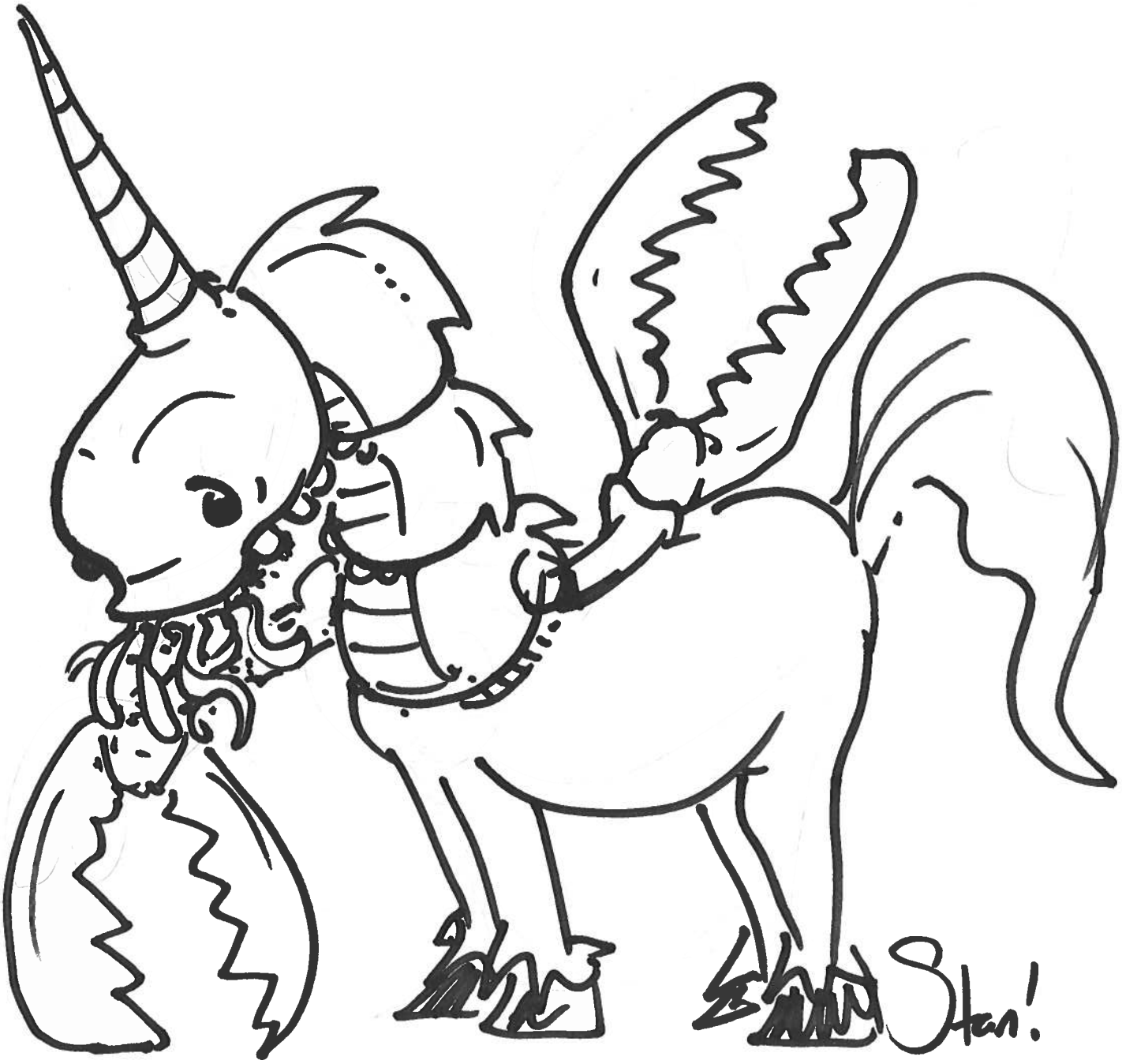
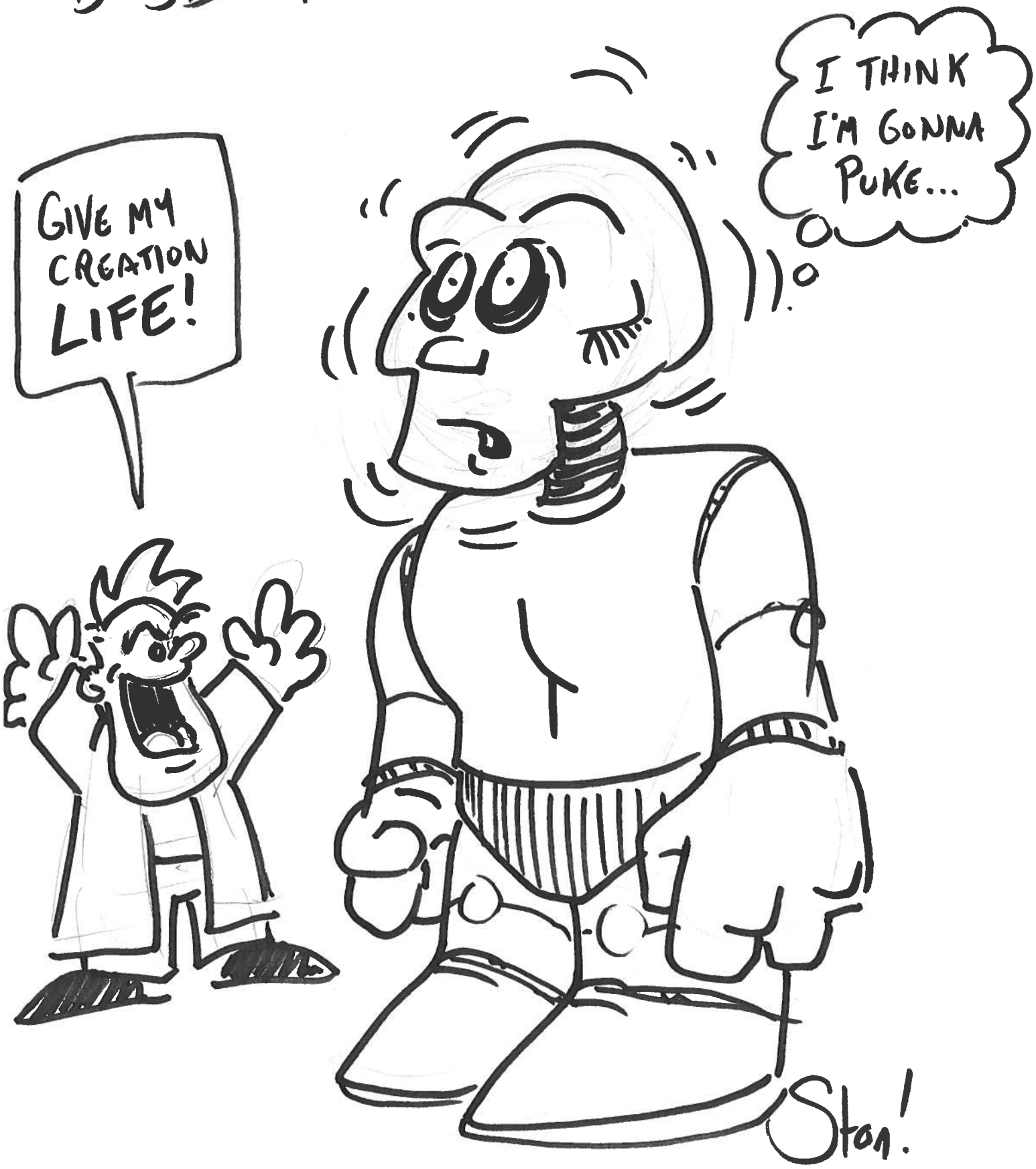


Stan!

BOBBLE HEAD GOLEM

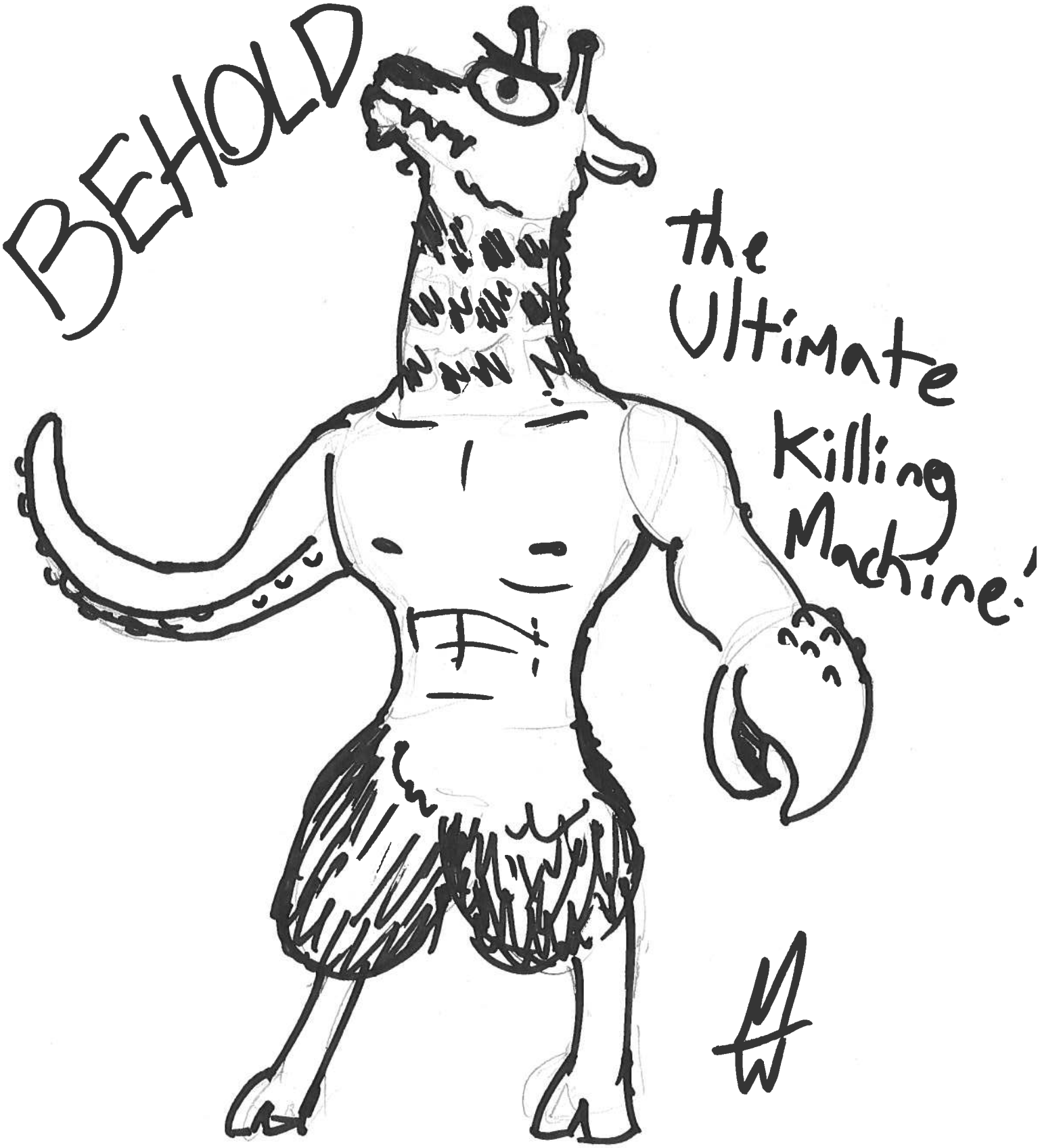


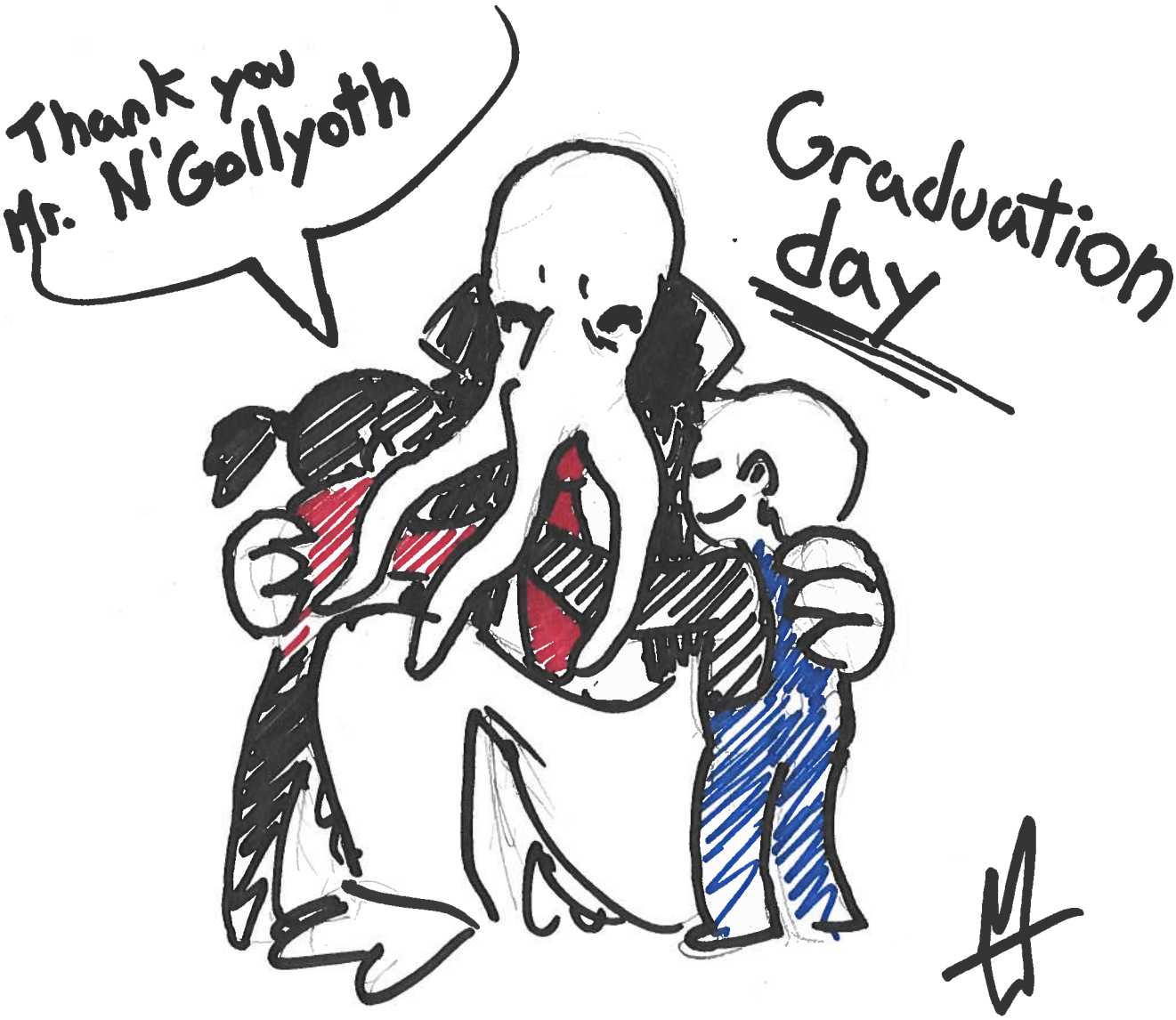
GELATINOUS CUBE, MIMIC, AND TODD

BAG of Holding

Snakes

I clearly labeled my side of the fridge.


BEHOLD
the Ultimate Killing Machine!


Thank you Mr. N'Gollyoth
Graduation day

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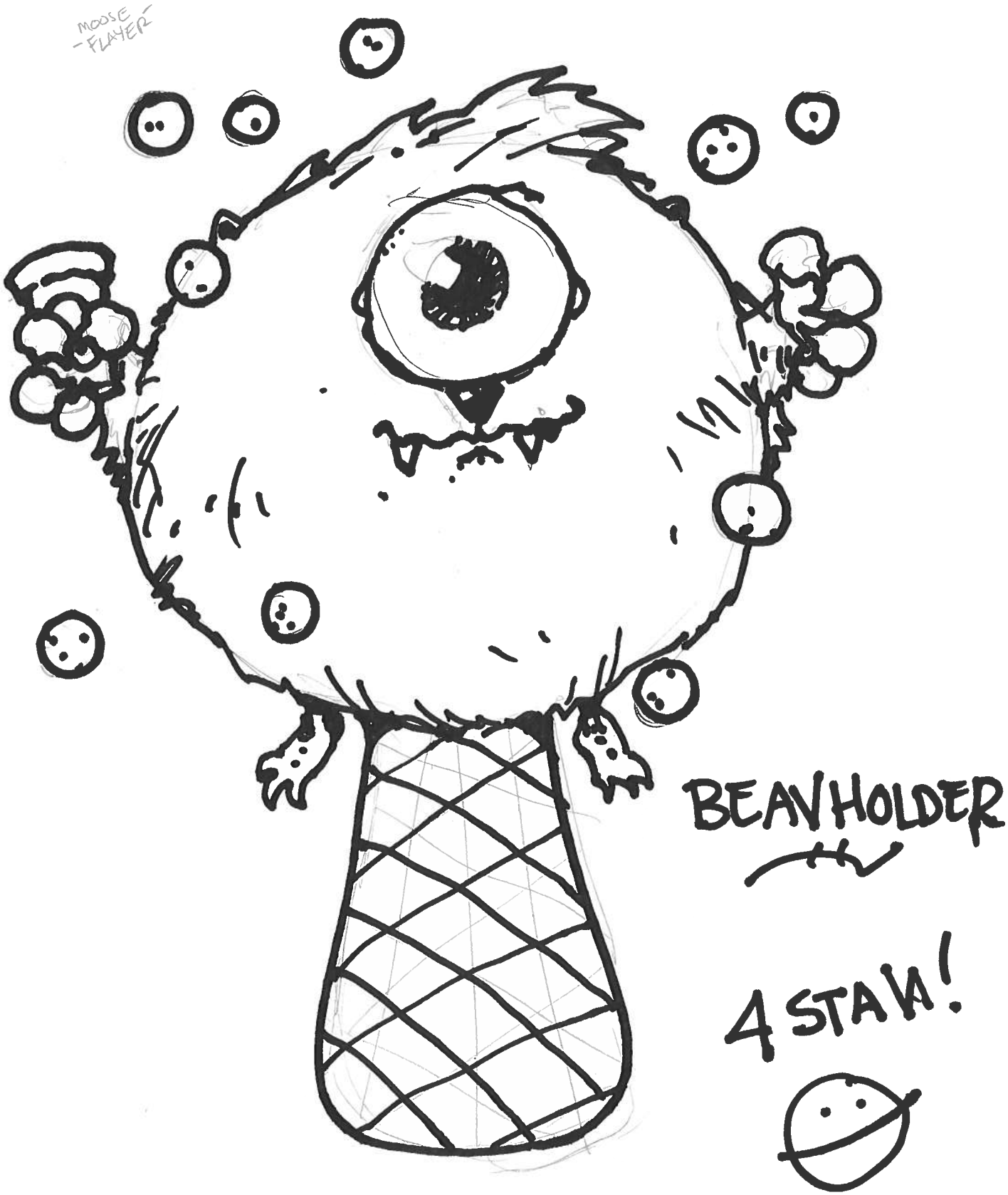
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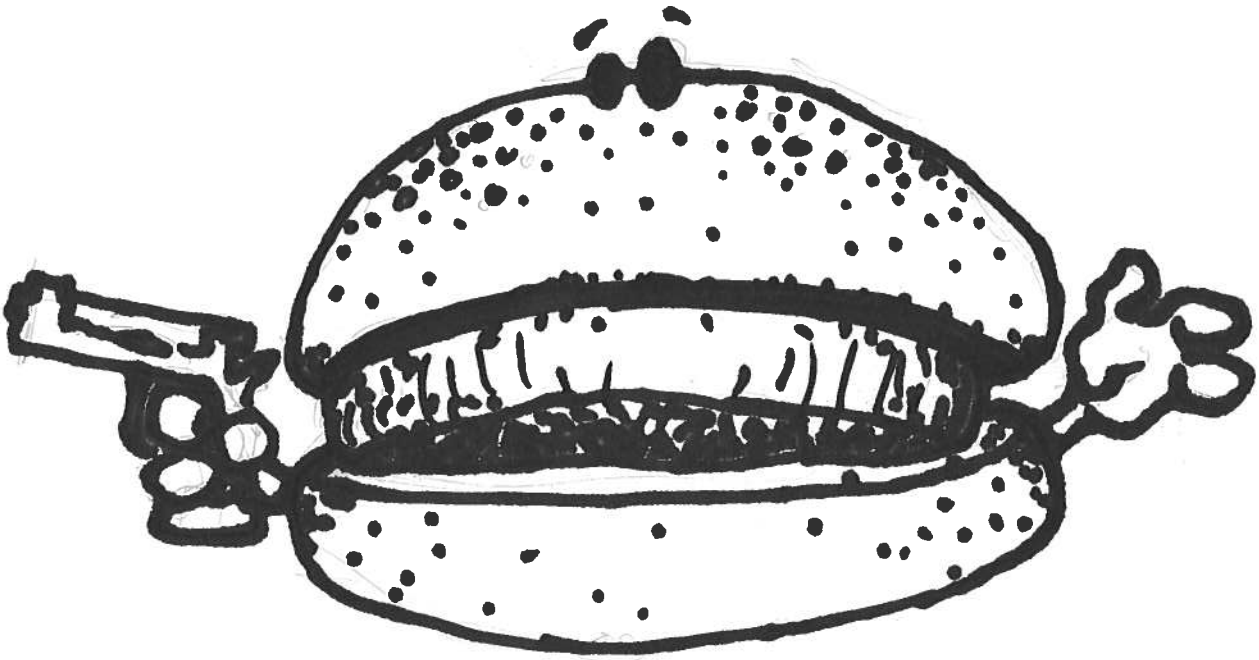
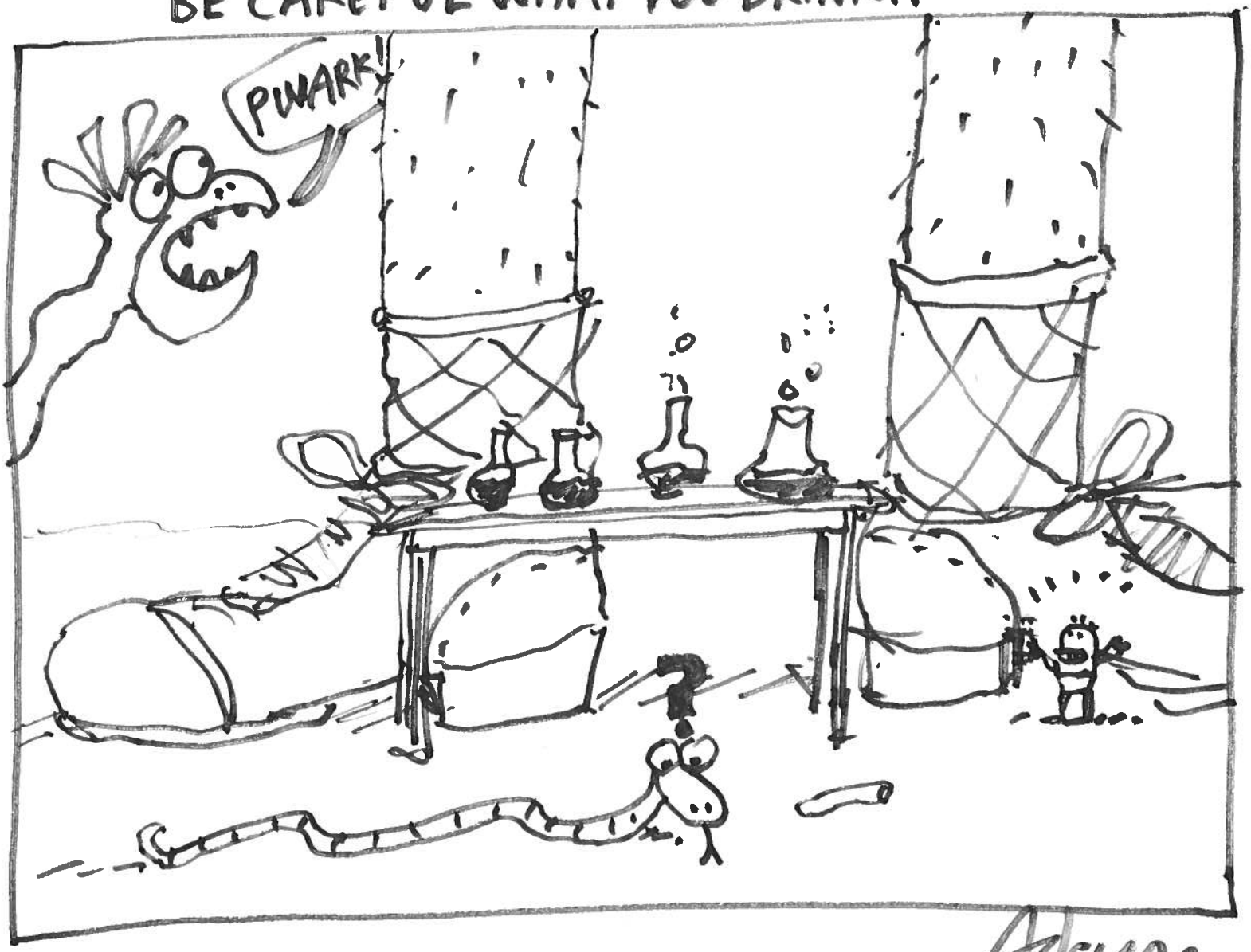


FOR PEJHAM ♡

LICH BANKER

FOR BORT!

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU DRINK!!



Adam

AD3D, 'eh?

CARIBOUBARIAN

2+2=
Adam

AXIS & ALLIES and HAMSTERS

Alan

PLACE YUZ BETZ!
ONE GOLD ON DEAD!
Stan!

HellMoose
Stan!

Skan!

AXIS & ALLIES & AARDVARKS

Dungeon Mayhem

Dungeon Mayhem is the fast-paced card game of feuding D&D heroes. David Axbey sat down with designers Jordan Comar and Roscoe Wetlaufer to find out more.

The dungeon's been cleared, the bad guys are down and the bickering begins. The paladin's convinced that the rogue is stealing all the best loot. The wizard makes a snide remark about the barbarian's IQ. Harsh words are spoken. Swords are drawn. Spells cast. Oh, it's on!

Dungeon Mayhem is a pocket-sized card game of feuding heroes that's as fast as it is fun. The brainchild of Jordan Comar and Roscoe Wetlaufer, the game sees two to four players battle to be the last hero standing in a frenzy of sword-swinging, spell-slinging card combat that'll appeal to seasoned adventurers and D&D newcomers alike.

"With *Dungeon Mayhem*, we wanted to create a light, quick and super-fun party game that could give the uninitiated a taste of D&D

and inspire them to come back for a full course meal, so to speak," says Wetlaufer.

"We wanted a game that would appeal to all ages and all backgrounds. The game says '8+' on the box and that's not an exaggeration. The core mechanics revolve around simple iconography. That allows players to quickly pick up the game and gain familiarity with it during the first round," adds Comar. "We've designed an experience that's perfect over the holidays with family, or at a bar with friends. You can throw it in your bag or purse and then pull it out whenever you've got a few minutes to spare."

Full of Character

Dungeon Mayhem comes with 28-card decks for each of the game's four heroes: half-orc barbarian Sutha the Skullcrusher; human wizard Azzan the Mystic; elf paladin Lia the Radiant; and tiefling rogue Oriax the Clever. The iconic character classes were selected to provide a good cross-section of D&D while being both intriguing and accessible—and each deck is tailor-made to reflect the unique fighting style of the class it portrays.

"Azzan the Mystic draws lots of cards and makes lots of choices. It's as if he has a full spell book," Wetlaufer explains. "Lia the Radiant is made of tough stuff, healing herself and dishing out loads of damage as she goes. Without a doubt, she's the hardest hero to take down. Oriax the Clever plays fast, dealing short bursts of damage and dodging in and out of combat. Plus, you get to steal stuff! And the barbarian deck hits hard; no wonder we named her Sutha the Skullcrusher!"

(Select to view)

The debut title from colleagues Comar and Wetlaufer, *Dungeon Mayhem*'s genesis dates back to

when the two friends were working together on the Wizards of the Coast (WotC) Trade Marketing team, supporting storeowners across the globe.

“While neither of us are game designers by trade or training, we’re both always exploring ways to introduce more people to the worlds we love,” says Wetlaufer. “Two years ago at lunch we started batting around an idea for a game. We knocked our heads together and quickly whipped up a rough prototype. As soon as we had that, we started playtesting with friends.

(Select to view)

“After a few months of tweaking, we started to shop the game around the office. We showed it off at company events, building a groundswell of support. Our big break came when our company President, Chris Cocks, played *Dungeon Mayhem* and liked it enough to bring it home to his family. He put us in front of the D&D team, and much to our amazement they said, ‘Yes’!”

Even better, the games-loving duo were given the go-ahead to continue developing the title themselves. But while the foundations of *Dungeon Mayhem* had already been laid during those productive lunch breaks, the game still needed to go through hundreds of iterations before its two creators deemed it ready for our tabletops.

“We’re like an old couple,” says Wetlaufer. “Our process basically consisted of nagging each other and making tiny changes non-stop.” “The biggest change by far was the addition of classes,” Comar recalls. “In our very first prototype, all the players drew off one shared deck. Adding classes gave the game depth and flavor. It was a massive upgrade.”

Dungeon Mayhem‘s intensive playtesting also garnered support from

an unexpected source: C.J. Prosise, running back for the local Seattle Seahawks.

"C.J. was a fantastic addition to the process," Wetlaufer tells *Dragon+*. "He joined us as part of a program that brings NFL players together with companies during the off-season. Huge thanks to Holly Barbacovi and Shelly Mazzanoble for connecting us. He was awesome to work with and was incredibly genuine and engaged. After the game was greenlit he ran our playtest sessions, collecting feedback and providing input."

Dozens of people from every corner of WotC also brought their expertise to bear during playtesting. In particular, Comar credits D&D fifth edition lead designer Mike Mearls with playing a crucial role in *Dungeon Mayhem*'s development, coming up with the card names that add so much flavor to the game.

The finished product is the popping candy of card games; a fast-playing, easy-to-learn tabletop experience that fizzes with fun. "In the end, we got everything we wanted!" says Comar. "The gameplay is light, fun, and quick, all without sacrificing depth and replayability."

"A clean design wasn't just a goal, it was our number one priority," adds Wetlaufer. "We knew the game's success hinged on it being easy to learn and seamless to play. When making design decisions we constantly asked each other: 'Is this intuitive? Is this complexity creep?'"

Card Sharps

In *Dungeon Mayhem*, each card in a character's deck represents one of their skills, tricks, items or allies—from Lia's cute pony Fluffy to Sutha's writhing Bag of Rats. As well as damaging an opponent and shielding yourself, cards may let you draw extra cards, take additional actions or recover hit points, with each effect clearly shown by a simple icon.

(Select to view)

The game's four heroes also each have a small selection of 'mighty powers' at their disposal; special abilities unique to that character with powerful and potentially game-changing effects. Take Azzan the Mystic's Fireball, for instance: a devastating magical explosion that hits everyone at the table for three damage… including Azzan himself.

"I absolutely love Fireball," says Wetlaufer. "It forces you to make tough choices. The game can end in a tie, and it can be used to set up epic combos. Vampiric Touch [which swaps two players' hit points], Magic Missile and Stoneskin are also awesome, from art to effect. You can tell I'm obsessed with the wizard; I don't mind getting caught in my own fireball every once in a while!"

Comar's favorite *Dungeon Mayhem* card is the rogue's Pick Pocket, which steals a card from another player's deck and immediately puts it into play. So if you're going to pick the wizard's pocket and pinch Fireball, it's a good idea to have more than three hit points!

Dungeon Mayhem's tongue-in-

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cheek take on classic D&D tropes is complemented by some wonderful card illustrations by Kyle Ferrin, who recently won plaudits for his work on the hit board game *Root*. "Kyle's a huge fan of Dungeons & Dragons so it was an awesome fit. We loved his work," says Comar.

"He truly captured the whimsical tones and the light, modern feel we were going for," agrees Wetlaufer. "The art has everything to do with the game being presentable and accessible. Portraying a diverse cast was also of the utmost importance to us too. Kyle took our concepts and fleshed them out with incredibly expressive characters."

Comar picks out Ferrin's art for Vampiric Touch as a personal favorite ("It's a delightful inversion of how spells are usually depicted"), also namechecking Clever Disguise and Magic Missile. Meanwhile, Wetlaufer tells *Dragon+* that Stoneskin wins hands down for him ("There's a hidden treat you might not notice at first glance!") although Lia the Radiant's Fluffy also gets a special mention.

"We wanted every part of the game to work together seamlessly," explains Comar. "The art sets a whimsical tone before you even open the box. The game mechanics give you a heads-up that it's a light-hearted ride—albeit with wild swings.

"Cards like Fireball and Vampiric Touch were designed to create hilarious and memorable moments where well-laid plans are torn

asunder. Win or lose, you'll be back in the next game in a few minutes!"

With each player using their own class-based deck, it also feels like *Dungeon Mayhem* is ripe for expansions, whether it's another standalone core set or individually-packaged decks. Sadly our *charm* spell fizzles, as both designers are staying tight-lipped about the future of their game.

"Sorry, no spoilers!" says Wetlaufer. "We couldn't be more thrilled about *Dungeon Mayhem* and if it's a success, let's hope we all see more *Mayhem*."

We'll second that!

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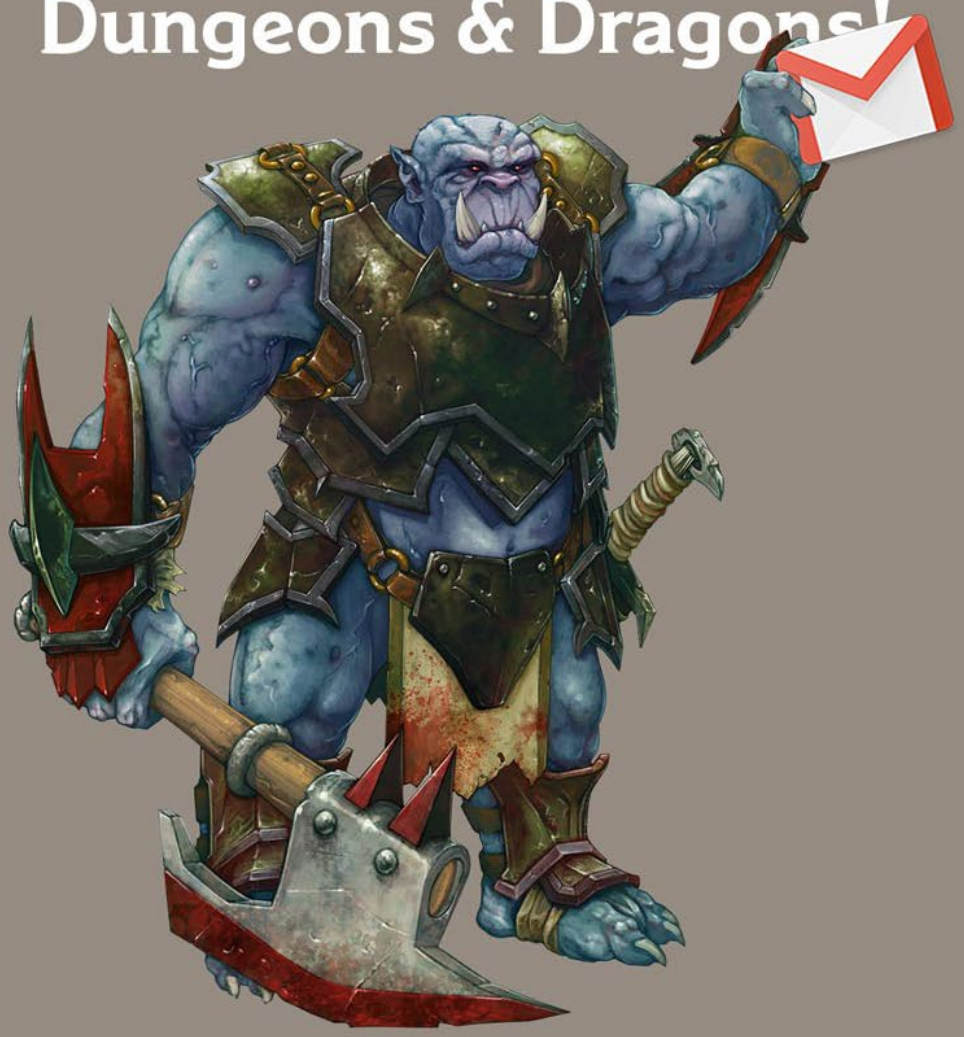

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Dragon Classic

This issue we look back at sailing ships and dangerous dungeons. Oh—and more holiday goodness!

Ships in Your Game
Ready to head over the bounding main? We've already discussed WizKids' fantastic version of *The Falling Star*, maps for which you can also find elsewhere this issue. Back in *Dragon* #412 we explored this very vessel in some detail, providing guidelines for creating customized ships as well as sample crew members and nautical adventure hooks for your campaign.

The seas can be dangerous though so just be sure to pack your red shirt… and/or your brown pants.

DOWNLOAD

Undermountain

Waterdeep can be a lively, occasionally peril-filled city—all the more exemplified by its entrance to Undermountain! If you're looking to further prep forays into the greatest dungeon of them all, past issues of *Dragon* can be delved for added detail:

Dragon #227:
Steven E. Schend writes that Waterdeep's entrance to the Undermountain is still as busy as ever… and to help make his point, his "Reports from Undermountain" offers numerous NPCs, rumors, and even modified maps to help further detail the experience.

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Dragon #239:
"Welcome, stout adventurers! We have pre-designed packs for all sorts, and we carry a new inventory of unusual items designed with the resourceful adventurer in mind." So begins Paul Culotta's pitch for Aurora's Undermountain Sale, suggesting gear for dungeon delvers eager to attempt their first foray into the mega-dungeon. Best stock up!

(Select to view)

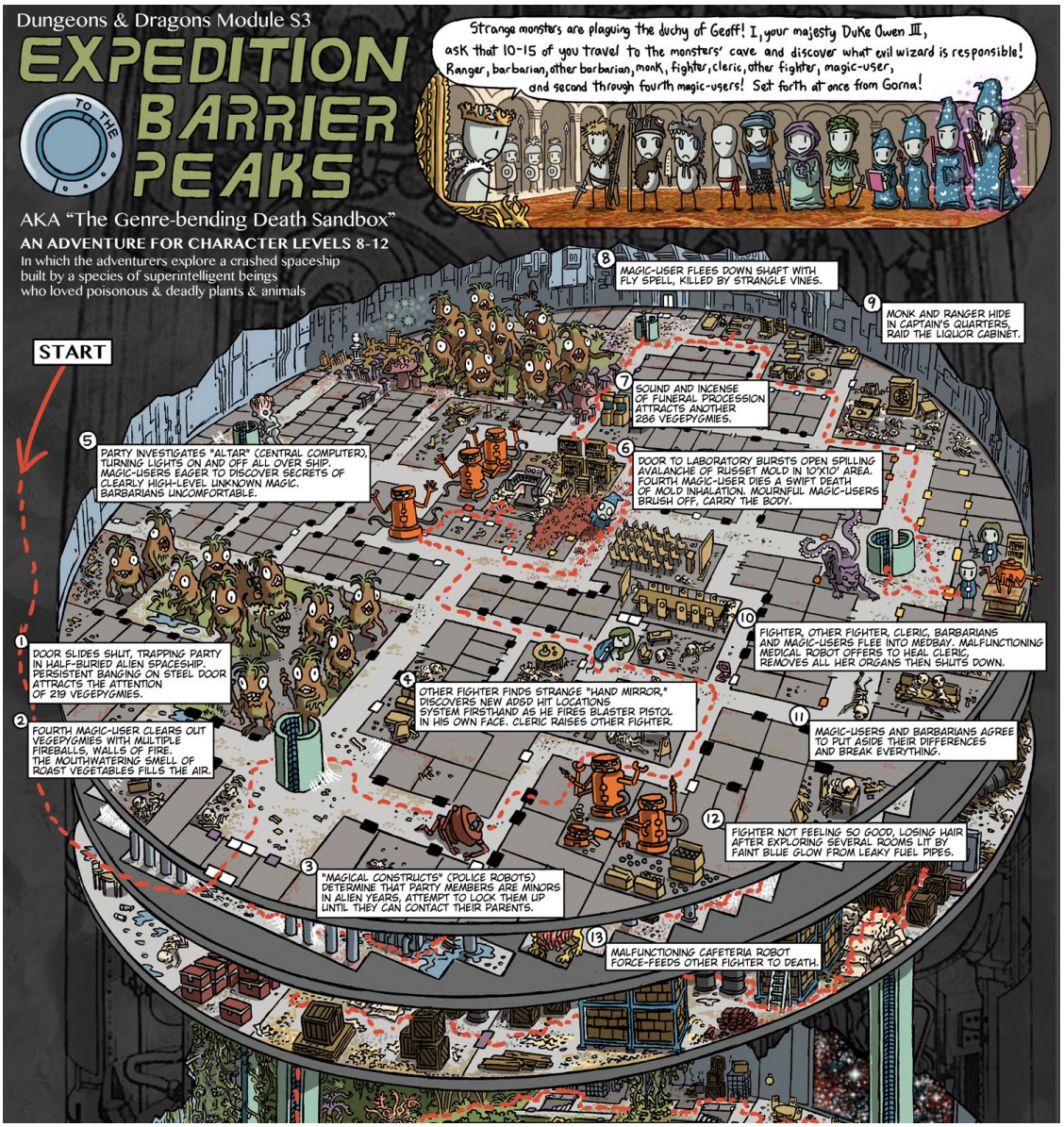
Barrier Peaks

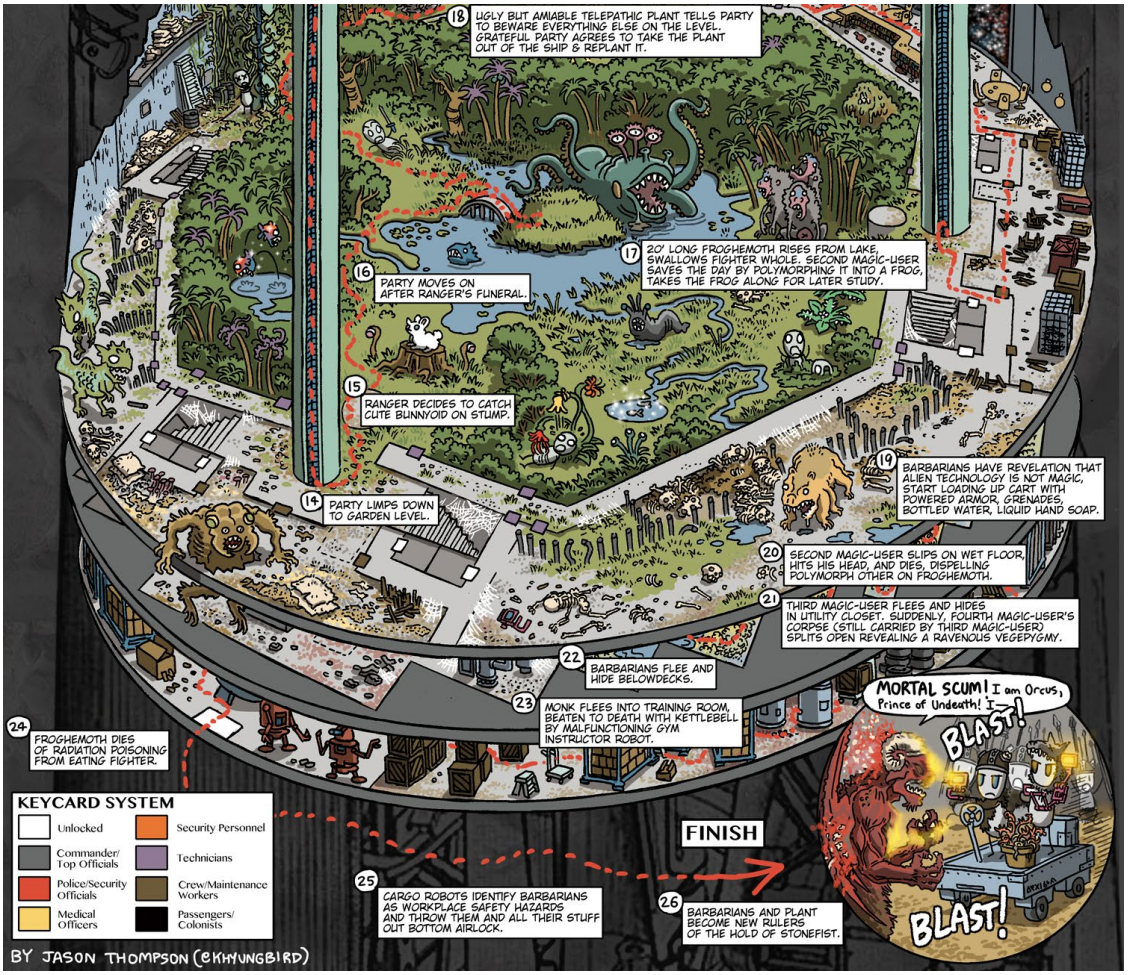
We certainly hope that you enjoyed our latest foray into the Barrier Peaks with this year's Extra Life adventure, *Lost Laboratory of Kwalish* . If you're looking for even more sci-fi themed material to augment your games, we'd refer you back to *Dragon* #410.

That issue's *Bazaar of the Bizarre* brought us "Thingamajigs of the Barrier Peaks"—including further options for powered armor, laser pistols, and many more items (as well as rules for when thingamajigs go bad).

DOWNLOAD BARRIER PEAKS

Plus, we couldn't pass up this opportunity to show off Jason Thompson's cartoon walkthrough of the original adventure module, *S3: Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*:





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Holiday Cheer

Looking for D&D holiday themed content to run? We've got you covered! For starters, let's head back to *Dragon+* #17 as that issue provided an original haunt for the *Betrayal at Baldur's Gate* board game. Written by Diane Molinari, *Spare the Rod* featured everyone's favorite yule-tide terror—Krampus!

READ ARTICLE

Later that same issue D&D Classics looked through the archives for further content—including a scenario at Nicolas the Gift-Giver's Northern Palace, fully updated by Scott Fitzgerald Gray to fifth edition!

READ ARTICLE

BACK TO TOP

Unearthed Arcana: Using Ships in Your Campaign

By Lori Anderson

Illustration by Adam Paquette
Cartography by Mike Schley

What could be better than the wind at your back, the sun shining warmly on your face, the soothing sound of waves crashing, and the gentle roll of the deck beneath your feet? As you set sail on the open sea, the air is electrified with the promise of adventure. Travel to exotic locales, explore unknown lands, encounter strange sea creatures, discover forgotten civilizations, and uncover buried treasure.

The ocean is filled with incredible beauty, great dangers, exotic creatures, and thrilling adventure. Adventure does not come without peril, and a good ship can make or break the journey.

Custom ships can add excitement to any seafaring campaign. This article provides a sample ship and guidelines for creating customized ships, as well as sample crew members and adventure hooks for using ships in your campaign.

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Example Ship: The Falling Star

Most people seeking to travel by ship request passage on a merchant ship heading in the same direction. The fare, negotiated with the captain, is typically paid in gold, service, or both, and varies based on the distance, the danger involved, the captain's temperament, and whether the destination requires a change to the original route. Many captains are glad to have adventurers aboard their ship and give them free passage in exchange for protection against creatures or pirates that might attack the ship. That is, of course, if the adventurers wish to travel where the ship is already scheduled to go. Captains are generally reluctant to alter their routes or travel in dangerous areas unless they are tempted with gold.

A carrack is a sailing vessel suited for exploration and ocean travel. It can withstand the high seas and fierce storms of the open ocean and has enough cargo room to carry the supplies necessary for long voyages. Alternatively, it can be used as a merchant vessel to transport goods. A carrack can be rented for 500 gp per week with a full crew or purchased outright for 9,000 gp.

A carrack has the following features, as shown on the map of *The Falling Star*.

1. Main Deck: The ship's main deck holds standard supplies for running and repairing the ship. Near the forecastle (area 2), a large crate is securely bolted down and filled with tools, ropes, and other supplies. A small rowboat is lashed to the middle of the deck. Carracks typically have between two and four masts, and a crow's nest sits at the top of the main mast.

2. Forecastle: The forecastle ("fo'c'sle") serves as a platform for archers to fire on enemy ships and as a defensive stronghold in case the ship is boarded. A ballista is located on each side of the forecastle. A small rowboat is also stored here. An anchor with a thick metal chain rests near the ship's railing.

3. Quarterdeck: The quarterdeck and its occupants are important for the navigation and control of the ship. The captain commands the ship from the quarterdeck, which is also where the pilot steers the ship and the quartermaster determines the ship's location and course. A large catapult lobs heavy stones or flaming balls of tar at enemy ships.

4. Supply Closet: This small supply closet holds basic supplies such as pails, mops, nets, and rope.

5. Officers' Dining Room: The cabin boy delivers food to the officers and other high-ranking crew members in this dining room. Comfortable chairs surround a wooden table. Fine linens are used for napkins, the dishes are made of porcelain, and the utensils are silver-plated. Prestigious passengers are often invited to dine with the officers.

6. Officers' Lounge: A couch and several plush chairs furnish this room, where the captain and his mates relax between shifts.

7. Chart Room: A large table covered with detailed nautical maps dominates this room. Maps and charts adorn the walls. A drawing table along one wall offers space for mapping unexplored areas. A sextant, compass, and various other navigational instruments sit on a small corner table.

8. Infirmary: Basic first aid supplies and rough surgical instruments are located in a cabinet along one wall. The supplies include bandages, ointments, slings, and herbal remedies. If a sailor has a more serious injury, he or she might be given a scrap of sailcloth to bite down on while his limb is amputated with a saw. Although the crew does its best to keep this room clean, bloodstains are visible on the floor and walls.

9. Head: The head empties directly into the ocean.

10. Crew Quarters: The crew's sleeping quarters are barren, with only hammocks and a series of small cubbies on the wall for the crew's personal belongings. Chalk marks on the wall count the number of days the ship has been out to sea.

11 & 12. Passenger's Quarters: These rooms have several sturdy, comfortable beds. At the foot of each bed is a large chest with a lock to store personal belongings. Each chest holds a complimentary jar of smelling salts or a pouch of herbs to alleviate seasickness.

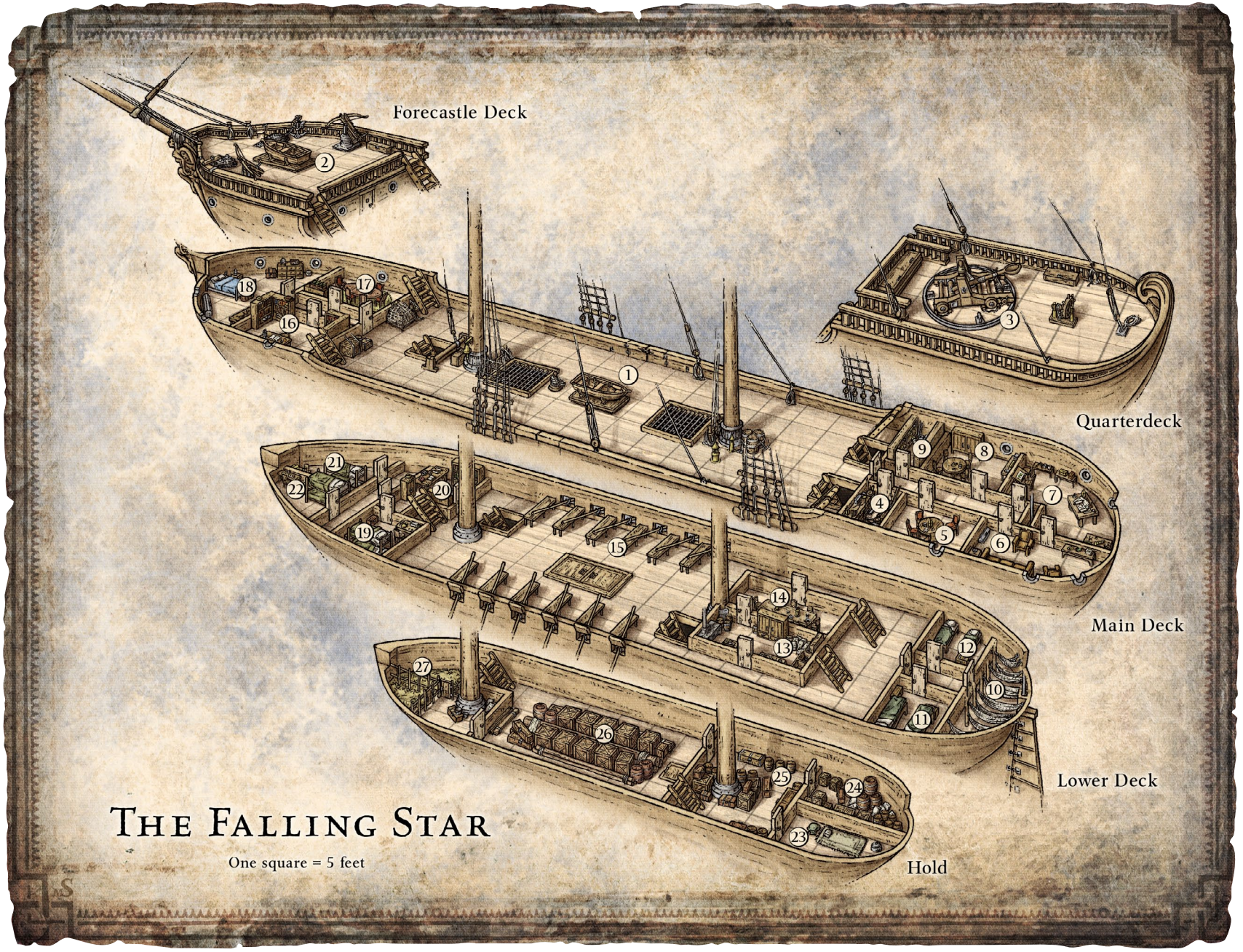
13. Galley: The galley, or ship's kitchen, has a small stove, a wash basin, and wooden cupboards filled with cooking utensils.

14. Mess Hall: This room is filled with two long tables and rows of wooden benches. Crew members gather around the tables to eat or to gamble.

15. Lower Deck: Rows of low wooden benches line each side of the lower deck. Long oars can be slid into the water for use when there is no wind in the sails, or for delicate maneuvering. When the oars are not in use, this area is used for storage.

16. Captain's Study: Against one wall of the study rests a large, sturdy writing table. There are also several bookcases with leather straps across each shelf to hold books in place during rough seas. Onlt the captain, the first mate, and the second mate are permitted to use this room.

17. Captain's Sitting Room: The captain entertains prestigious guests in this lavishly appointed sitting room. Since it is one of the most private locations on the ship, the captain also uses this room to discuss matters that he or she wishes to keep quiet. Several burgundy chairs with gold trim surround a low mahogany table. An elegant gold candelabra illuminates the room, powered by the magic similar to an *everburning torch*. An intricately carved liquor cabinet graces one corner, and a thick ornamental rug covers the rough floorboards. As in every room, the furniture is bolted to the floor, but here the bolts are cleverly concealed so as not to ruin the room's ambiance. Tapestries of nautical scenes decorate the walls,


Forecastle Deck
Quarterdeck
Main Deck
Lower Deck
Hold
The Falling Star
One square = 5 feet

and one hides a small compartment where the captain stores his valuables.

18. Captain's Quarters: The captain's sleeping quarters are fairly plain compared to the rest of his suite. A large wooden bed with fine linens dominates this room, and a massive wooden bureau stands against one wall.

19. Pantry: One level down from the galley sits a food pantry filled with sacks of grain, large cans of beans and vegetables, barrels of water, casks of brandy, and other consumables.

20. Cargo Hold: Additional cargo that cannot fit in the main cargo hold is stored in this room.

21 & 22. Mates' Quarters: The first mate and the second mate share this room, which contains a bunk bed and two large chests.

23. Brig: The brig is a small, unfurnished room in the bowels of the ship. The door has a window with iron bars and a small slit to pass food through. A straw mat and a chamber pot are the only objects present.

24. Secured Cargo Hold: Unusually valuable cargo is stored in this room, which is locked with a stout iron padlock. The captain carries the only key.

25. Main Pantry: This pantry is filled with large crates of food as well as barrels of water and beer. Supplies from this room are used to restock the small pantry nearer to the galley.

26. Main Cargo Hold: The ship's total carrying capacity is 400 tons of cargo.

27. Livestock Pens: These pens house livestock such as goats, hens, and the occasional pig. The animals provide fresh meat and eggs, and are especially important on long journeys when food supplies may run low.

TRAVEL SPEEDS

A ship's speed can vary considerably, depending as it does on prevailing winds. Typical travel speeds are about 4 knots, or 100 miles traveled per day. The table below shows average travel speeds based on wind conditions.

SHIP TRAVEL SPEEDS

Wind Speed	Knots	Miles/Day
No wind	0	0
Light breeze	1	30
Rowing	1	30
Moderate wind	4	100
Strong wind	6	165
Gale-force wind	8	220

Standard Crew

A standard crew for a carrack includes a captain, a first mate, a second mate, a quartermaster, a boatswain, a pilot, a cook, a cabin boy or girl, and eighteen to twenty sailors. The captain is responsible for the safe and efficient operation of the ship. The captain also resolves disputes among the crew and is the ultimate authority on all matters. The first mate and the second mate are second and third in command. The quartermaster is responsible for navigation and maintenance of nautical charts. The boatswain is the supervisor of the deck crew and also performs routine inspections and maintenance of the vessel. The boatswain also serves as the ship's surgeon, since he or she is the most skilled with a saw and can perform rough amputations or stitch someone up if necessary. The pilot helms the ship and is responsible for safely steering the carrack through dangerous or shallow waters. The cabin boy or girl runs errands for the captain and performs other menial tasks such as cleaning, delivering messages, and carrying supplies. The remaining crew members perform various duties as needed, including cleaning, maintenance, trimming the sails, and serving as lookouts.

The day is broken into three eight-hour shifts. Each crew member works one shift, sleeps one shift, and has one shift for leisure. Three crew members, one from each shift, share a single hammock. The captain usually commands the morning shift, the first mate commands the afternoon shift, and the second mate is stuck with the night shift.

Leisure Time

Life on board, staring out at a seemingly endless sea, can sometimes be enough to test even the stoutest sailor's sanity. Leisure time is important for maintaining order and high morale among the crew. When sailors are off-duty, they engage in a variety of activities for entertainment.

Games of cards and dice are popular ways of passing the time. Dice are typically made of wood, bone, or ivory. Specialty dice bear images of monsters instead of pips, with more dangerous creatures having a higher value. For example, a six-sided die might feature a bronze dragon, a water elemental, a dragon turtle, a kraken, a giant crab, and a shark.

Gambling aboard ship takes many forms, from card and dice games to betting on everyday things. Common bets include who will be reprimanded first on a given shift, what kind of slop will pass as dinner, or which passenger will be the first to get seasick. Sailors aren't typically rich, so they usually bet in copper pieces, small luxuries such as reading material, exotic delicacies, alcohol, or services such as kitchen duty or extra lookout rotations.

No sea voyage would be complete without drinking, singing, and crude jokes. Tall tales might also provide hours of entertainment, each story more outrageous than the one before.

HAVE YOU HEARD THE ONE ABOUT . . .

- The shipwreck survivor who floated on a plank of wood for a year and survived by catching fish with his bare hands?
- The prince who died of heartache when his lover went out to sea?
- A ship that survived a 2,000-foot-tall tsunami without waking the captain's baby or spilling a glass of water on a table?
- The girl who leaped into the ocean because she thought she was a dolphin? (She was seen many years later swimming with a pod of dolphins—and she had tiny flippers and a tail.)
- The sailor who was swallowed by a kraken and lived in its stomach for four months before the beast was killed by fishers? (The sailor survived, but her skin was bleached white, she lost her vision, and she went mad.)
- The sailor who wrestled the dragon turtle and defeated it with his bare hands?

Other pastimes include reading, writing in journals, sketching, and daydreaming. Sailors rarely exercise during their leisure time, since they do plenty of labor-intensive chores while on duty.

Crew members might also spend time praying or making small offerings to their deities. Most sailors revere Melora, god of the sea, and pray to her for safe travel. Sailors might also pray to Kord, the storm god, to spare them from fierce tempests.

The captain does not fraternize with the rest of the crew, as that might cause them to view him as an equal, undermining his authority. He therefore spends much of his leisure time alone or with officers of similar station. If the ship is carrying a distinguished passenger, the captain might invite this individual to his sitting room for conversation over tea. Some captains entertain their guests with a game of Three-Dragon Ante using a beautifully hand-painted deck, or Dragonchess with a carved ivory chess set. The captain might also spend his or her off hours reading or keeping a log.

Types of Ships

When the time comes to purchase a ship, there are several varieties to choose from.

Apparatus of Kwalish: This lobster-shaped vehicle can travel underwater and carries two Medium creatures plus their gear.

Argosy: This bulky trading vessel has substantial cargo capacity and requires only a small crew, making it popular with merchants. However, it moves slowly and is difficult to handle during storms.

Carrack: This is the example ship described in detail in the previous section. It carries 30 people and holds up to 400 tons of cargo.

Clipper: This long, narrow ship is capable of reaching high speeds but has little room for cargo.

Greatship: This enormous ship can carry 200 people and up to 500 tons of cargo. During wartime, it is used to transport large numbers of soldiers.

Longship: Ideally suited for river travel or beach landings, this slender vessel does not have much cargo space.

Pinnace: This ship is versatile and well suited to ocean voyages and coastal travel. The cheapest ship suitable for travel on the high seas, the pinnace is also cheap to run since it requires only a small crew.

Rowboat: This small boat is used for travel on small lakes and streams. Rowboats are also found on larger vessels and are used for exploring new shorelines and beach landings in places where the larger ship cannot dock.

SHIP TYPES

Ship Name	Cargo	Cost (gp)
Rowboat	200 lbs	50
Pinnace*	30 tons	1,800
Apparatus of Kwalish*	200 lbs	5,000
Longship*	3 tons	5,000
Clipper	5 tons	5,000
Carrack	400 tons	9,000
Argosy	2,000 tons	9,000
Greatship*	500 tons	13,000

*Ship first presented in *Adventurer's Vault*

Shipboard Magic Items

A ship owner with money to burn might equip his or her vessel with magical weapons and other amenities. This section presents a collection of pricy items designed to make a ship more effective in combat or life aboard the ship more pleasant.

Unless noted otherwise, the items presented below must be installed on a ship to function. In addition, some items might be inappropriate for ships of smaller size; for example, one cannot install a *captain's feast table* on a rowboat. The determines whether an item is appropriate for a particular kind of ship.

A magic item classified as a ship component (as opposed to wondrous items) functions only when attached to a ship or used aboard a ship.

Alchemist's Lab Level 10 Uncommon

This fully-stocked laboratory is filled with beakers, vials, and strange ingredients such as dragon teeth and jars of bullywug eyeballs.

Wondrous Item 5,000 gp

Properties

- You take half the normal amount of time to create alchemical items, ritual scrolls, and potions in the laboratory.
- You gain a +2 item bonus to Arcana checks while in the laboratory.

Cabin of Tranquillity — Level 12 Uncommon

Anyone who rests in this comfortable cabin awakens feeling refreshed and ready to take on the world.

Ship Component 13,000 gp

Property

Any creature that takes an extended rest in this cabin gains 15 temporary hit points that last until expended or until the start of the creature's next extended rest.

Captain's Feast Table — Level 9 Uncommon

This highly polished round oak table seats twelve and provides a magnificent banquet for all present.

Ship Component 4,200 gp

Utility Power ✦ Daily (Standard Action)

Effect: A delicious feast for 12 creatures appears on the table. Once the meal is finished, the table's owner can use a minor action to instantly clean the table.

Dragonstrike Ballista — Level 17 Uncommon

If anyone dares attack your ship, you assault them with magical bolts of lightning.

Ship Component 65,000 gp

Property

A creature can use an arcane ballista by entering a square on deck adjacent to the ballista. Only one creature can use a ballista at a time, and the ballista does not require ammunition.

Attack Power (Lightning) **✦ At-Will** (Standard Action)

Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +20 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d10 + 4 lightning damage. Each creature adjacent to the target takes half damage.

Elemental Engine — Level 15 Rare

Water elementals are bound to the ship, providing motive force and making travel less dangerous.

Ship Component 25,000 gp

Properties

✦ The ship can travel and maneuver under the captain's command without a crew.

✦ The ship is safely guided around reefs, rocks, whirlpools, and other natural hazards.

Figurehead of Balance — Level 13 Uncommon

A beautiful figurehead adorns the ship's bow and makes the ship's crew and passengers more sure-footed.

Ship Component 17,000 gp

Properties

✦ The ship's crew and passengers gain a +2 item bonus to saving throws made to avoid being knocked overboard.

✦ When an effect would knock a crew member or passenger prone, the creature can make a saving throw to avoid being knocked prone.

Flag of Resistance — Level 6+ Uncommon

Your colors provide the ship's passengers and crew with a shield of protection against all threats.

Lvl 6	1,800 gp	Lvl 26	1,125,000 gp
Lvl 16	45,000 gp		

Ship Component

Property

While aboard the ship or within 5 squares of it, the ship's crew and passengers gain resist 5 to all damage.

Level 16: Resist 10.

Level 26: Resist 15.

Nautical Chart of Tracking — Level 4+ Common

These charts display the ship's immediate surroundings.

Lvl 4	840 gp	Lvl 24	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	21,000 gp		

Ship Component

Properties

This nautical chart displays the ship's general position relative to major known ports and landmasses within 100 miles.

Level 14: Within 1,000 miles.

Level 24: Within 1,000 miles. In addition, the chart shows the relative location of any other ship you mention by name, provided the ship is within 1,000 miles of the nautical chart.

Ocean's Keel — Level 20 Rare

This magical keel makes the ship glide faster through the water and allows you to create a protective bubble around the ship as it dives under the water.

Ship Component 125,000 gp

Utility Power ✦ Daily (Standard Action)

Effect: The ship's swim speed becomes 10, and it can travel underwater without damage to the ship or its cargo. In addition, all living creatures are protected as if subject to the Waterborn ritual, as long as they remain within 20 squares of the ship. Creatures remain with the ship as it travels unless they swim away from the ship. Similarly, objects remain with the ship and do not float away unless they are thrown overboard. These effects last for 12 hours or until the ship surfaces.

Special: Only those designated by the ship's captain can use this power.

Sails of Speed — Level 10 Common

These magically enhanced sails allow the ship to travel at much greater speed.

Ship Component 5,000 gp

Properties

✦ When raised, these sails allow the ship to travel at up to twice its normal speed.

✦ If there is no wind, the raised sails fill as though there was a light breeze.

Shipboard Shrine — Level 10 Uncommon

This shrine provides a quiet place for reflection and prayer.

Wondrous Item 5,000 gp

Properties

✦ Divination rituals performed in the shrine take half the normal amount of time to cast.

✦ You gain a +5 item bonus to Religion checks made as part of a divination ritual.

✦ Once per day, you can cast the Read Omens ritual in the shrine without spending its component cost or possessing a focus. This power functions only once per day, even if multiple individuals visit the shrine.

Smuggler's Hold Level 15 Uncommon

A secret compartment conceals illicit goods.

Ship Component 25,000 gp

Property

The *smuggler's hold* is an easily concealable door 3 inches on a side that, when opened, transforms into the mouth of an extradimensional space 15 feet on a side. When closed, the hold cannot be detected by nonmagical means. The captain can automatically locate and open the *smuggler's hold*.

Spyglass of Perception Level 3 Common

Peering through this handheld telescope brings the world into clearer focus.

Wondrous Item 680 gp

Property

You gain a +3 item bonus to Perception checks when using this device.

Stern Rudder Level 15 Uncommon

This rudder magically fortifies your ship and makes it more resilient in combat.

Ship Component 25,000 gp

Property

The ship gains a +5 item bonus to AC and Fortitude, and its maximum hit points increase by 50 percent.

Teleportation Mast Level 9 Uncommon

This mast is inscribed with magical runes that allow crew and passengers to teleport to other areas of the ship.

Ship Component 4,200 gp

Utility Power (Teleportation) ✦ **At-Will** (Standard Action)

Effect: You touch the mast with your hand and teleport to any unoccupied space aboard the ship that isn't deemed off limits by the ship's captain. If the space you wish to teleport to is occupied by another creature, you appear in the nearest unoccupied space aboard the ship.

Special: Only crew members and passengers designated by the captain can use this power.

Advanced Crew Members

Here's a sampling of specialized individuals who can be added to any crew for a price. These templates should be used in conjunction with the hireling rules presented in *Mordenkainen's Magnificent Emporium*™.

Hunter

Cost: Standard

Hunters are experts at catching fish and other sea creatures with harpoons or nets. They also know which body parts of aquatic creatures are worth money as components.

Traits

☼ **Hunting Expert** ✦ **Aura** 5

Allies in the aura gain a +2 power bonus to knowledge checks about aquatic creatures.

Medic

Cost: Standard × 2

Medics perform amputations, set broken bones, stitch up wounds, and the like. Ship medics use mostly mundane tools and herbal remedies, as they do not have magical abilities.

Traits

☼ **Helping Hands** ✦ **Aura 5**

Allies in the aura gain a +2 power bonus to Heal checks.

Cleric

Cost: Standard × 4

Cleric use magic to cure diseases and heal grievous wounds. They can also perform rituals and provide spiritual guidance. If someone dies, the cleric can perform the last rites and conduct a proper burial at sea, as well as provide solace to crew members and passengers. Wealthy, high-ranking individuals typically insist on having clerics with them when they travel.

Traits

☼ **Helping Hands** ✦ **Aura 5**

Allies in the aura gain a +2 power bonus to Heal checks.

Curative Care (healing)

The cleric can attend to one ally during a short rest. At the end of the short rest, that ally regains 5 extra hit points for each healing surge spent.

Sacred Knowledge

The cleric knows and can perform the Raise Dead ritual.

Druid

Cost: Standard × 3

Druids familiar with the ocean can be invaluable when dealing with rough or dangerous seas. They are adept at predicting the weather, and when sea creatures attack the ship, they can help to communicate with the hostile creatures and convince them to stop their attack.

Traits

☼ **One With Nature** ✦ **Aura 5**

Allies in the aura gain a +2 power bonus to skill checks related to natural creatures.

Predict Weather

The druid can perform the Portend Weather ritual once per day without ritual components.

Mage

Cost: Standard × 3

Mages can summon wind into the sails for faster travel or scare off pirate ships by casting illusions of giant sea creatures and the like. Even if they pierce the illusion, most pirates hesitate to mess with a ship that has one or more mages aboard, fearing that their wooden ships might go up in flames.

Traits
☼ **Master Arcanist ✦ Aura 5**
Allies in the aura gain a +2 power bonus to Arcana checks.
Standard Actions
Ritual Expert ✦ Daily
Effect: One ally gains a +5 item bonus to the next skill check made for a ritual that uses the Arcana skill.
Summon Winds ✦ Daily
Effect: The mage summons winds to assist the ship. For the next 8 hours, the ship's swim speed is increased by 2.

Adventure Hooks

Once they have a ship, the PCs need an exciting seafaring adventure to go on! Drop these adventure hooks into your campaign, or allow their ideas to inspire your own.

The Flower Race: Every year, the heroes' home city hosts a regatta that all of the merchant houses compete in. The ships must travel to Lily Island, collect the rare magenta lily that grows there, and return. The route is treacherous, a rival house might try to sabotage the ship, and competitors sometimes attack each other when they are out at sea and away from the watchful eyes of the judges.

Unwelcome Fate: The merchant carrack *Lady Luck* has fallen on hard times. For the past month, the ship has been attacked by pirates on every voyage, despite taking alternate routes and adjusting its schedule. The vessel's owner hires the adventurers for added security, and to ferret out the cause of this ill luck. One of the crew members is a mole working with a group of pirates. Using a magical beacon, he broadcasts the ship's location and informs the pirates where the most valuable cargo is stored. The pirates then attack, steal the cargo, and split the loot with the mole at the next port.

Undersea Expedition: History books speak of a glorious city of sea elves deep in the ocean, but no one has traveled to the area for quite some time. Scholars are interested in discovering the fate of the city, while merchants are interested in forming a trade agreement with the sea elves—or plundering the city if the inhabitants are gone.

The Ghost Ship: A ghost ship haunts the waters near Rivenskull Island. The plot thickens when it is discovered that the ship's passengers were a team of royal diplomats sent to reach an alliance between nations on the verge of war. Who killed them and why? It appears someone would benefit from a war being started.

The Unquiet Maiden: A wealthy noble family commissioned a ship to be built as a wedding gift for their eldest daughter. The *Gentle Maiden* is a finely crafted, elegant ship with hand-carved railings and a stunningly beautiful figurehead. Of late, however, the ship has been haunted by an elegiac wailing, and fierce waves lash around the not-yet-completed vessel. Sailors believe the ship is cursed, and they refuse to sail on it. With the wedding only a few days away, the ship needs to be ready to take the couple on their honeymoon. The figurehead is actually a magically trapped hamadryad, and the fierce waves are sea nymphs trying to free their sister. The wizard tasked with overseeing the ship's construction doesn't want others to know he bound a hamadryad to the vessel, and he tries to subvert the adventurers at every turn.

Nightlands: A mysterious island is said to appear only once every thousand years. It appears out of nowhere on a moonless night, remains for one full day, and then slips silently under the sea once more. What riches and mysteries does this island hold? Where does it come from, and why does it appear so infrequently?

Sing No More: A cluster of islands called the Singing Stones have gone silent. Their soothing lullabies are the stuff of bards' tales, and the stones have served as a beacon of hope for sailors and a navigational aid for as long as anyone can remember. Several ships have reported seeing the mutilated bodies of sea nymphs floating in the water near the now-quiet islands.

Rituals for Seafaring Adventures

There are several rituals that benefit seabound adventurers. Water Breathing (level 8), Water's Gift (level 10), and Waterborn (level 14) all grant the ability to breathe underwater, and the higher-level rituals grant additional underwater benefits as well. Water Walk (level 2) grants the ability to walk on water, and Lower Water (level 2) causes a body of water to become shallower. Control Weather (level 14) can be used to calm a deadly storm or create wind when in the doldrums. The Purify Water ritual (level 1) can be used to make seawater drinkable.

Rift at Dagger Point: Ships have been disappearing near Dagger Point. Merchants and political leaders in ports along the trade route are growing concerned, since trade has essentially stopped. A huge whirlpool has formed off Dagger Point, and at its center yawns a rift to the Elemental Chaos. An unscrupulous efreet is using the whirlpool to draw merchant ships into the Elemental Chaos, and he has earned a tidy profit selling their trade goods—and selling the crew into slavery!

Ship of Kings: Two warring kings agree to meet one another to discuss a truce, and after months of negotiation it's agreed they will meet in a neutral location, away from the prying eyes and eager ears of their unscrupulous advisors. They elect to hold the meeting on the open sea aboard the adventurers' ship. When a sahuagin baron declares war on both kingdoms and attacks the ship, the adventurers must repel the sahuagin threat and remind the kings they have a common enemy.

About the Author

Lori Anderson is active in the RPGA and the New England gaming community. She has written several *Living Forgotten Realms* (LFR) adventures, including *The Agony of Almraiven*, *Containing Shadow*, and *Plain of Stone Spiders*.

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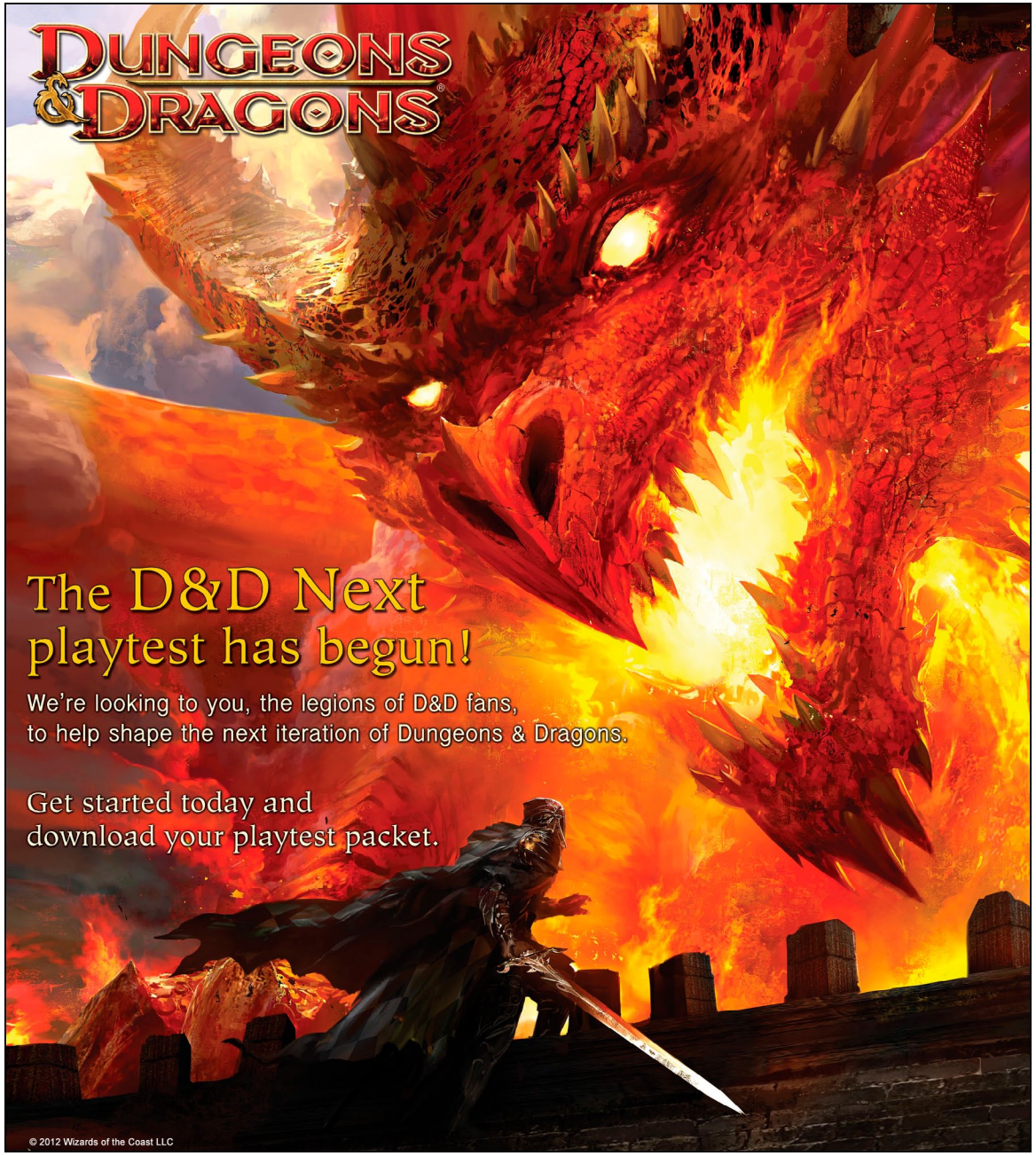

Bazaar of the Bizarre:

Thingamajigs of the Barrier Peaks

By Dave Chalker

Illustration by Mark Winters and Drew Baker

Surely you have heard the tales of the strange creatures that plagued the Grand Duchy. No? Well, allow me, your humble shopkeeper, to enlighten you today. These stories tell of how predatory creatures emerged from a gated cave at random intervals. The area defied all attempts at exploration until recently, when one expedition to the Barrier Peaks explored the caves to attempt to stem the tide of strange invaders. During their efforts, they found some unusual items and brought them back. Lucky for you, I have these very items on sale here. Let me tell you about them.

The Legend of the Barrier Peaks

The group of adventurers was successful, after a fashion, though at great cost. Only one survivor named Kzunt made it out of the Barrier Peaks alive to tell the tale of what happened. His stories included details of strange devices that operated under a kind of magic that the wizards of his group could not decipher. Other descriptive tidbits of the location include colored doors accessed only by flat keys of matching colors, metal rooms, guardian golems possessed of unique intelligence, sinister plant creatures unlike any ever encountered before, a creeping brown toxic mold, and enormous frogs. Even stranger, the structure seemed to have arrived there from far away and crashed into the mountains, and Kzunt theorized that it had originally been inhabited by another race that was now absent.

Even for the stories of adventurers, Kzunt's tales of the Barrier Peaks seemed too unusual to be true. Descriptions of metal vessels, tentacled ambush bunnies, and strange devices have no place in the lands of the Duchy. The stories were judged to be the product of whatever horrors Kzunt witnessed within the Barrier Peaks, or possibly the result of the strange disease that he had contracted within the caves, which had caused his skin to become scaly, like that of a dragonborn. Though he was thanked for his service to the Grand Duchy and rewarded appropriately, Kzunt was dismissed from the service of the land.

That is when I encountered Kzunt. It seemed that the adventurer had left out an important detail: He had recovered a number of the devices from within the Barrier Peaks. These unreliable yet powerful devices were all that Kzunt had left.

I listened to all of Kzunt's tales, especially those that involved these devices, with great interest. We worked out an arrangement where I would pay him for these devices and also would fund whatever healing magic he needed to recover from the strange disease that afflicted him. The clerics, unfortunately for him, could not help Kzunt recover. The disease progressed such that he grew extra arms, turned purple, and lost the ability to speak.

I hired the best wizards and servants to help finish cataloguing these devices, or "thingamajigs," as Kzunt liked to refer to them. These items of strange magic work like nothing we have encountered before. My research staff has done its best to discern their functions and operations, and I am happy to train you in their use if you seek to use them in your grand quests. You must first promise always to remember the stories of those who journeyed to the Barrier Peaks to recover these devices, and to always operate the devices in the manner in which they were intended.

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FOR THE DM: WHEN THINGAMAJIGS GO BAD

To set these items that have science fiction themes apart from more traditional magic items, consider using these rules to simulate the unreliability of long-abandoned technological marvels. Be mindful of the consequences of using these rules; a player whose character is built around the use of *powered armor* won't be happy if the armor ceases to function.

Each item in this article has a stability rating.

Item	Stability	Item	Stability
blaster rifle	-3	laser sword	+0
blue communicator	+3	*needler pistol*	+0
chainsaw sword	+0	*powered armor*	-4
confusion ray	-4	*singularity grenade*	-4
gray security card	+3	*sleep grenade*	-4
jet pack	-2	*wheely sled*	+1

The first time each turn that a character uses an item's power, roll a d20 and add the item's stability rating, then find the result on the list below. When the text mentions a malfunction, refer to the "Malfunction" entry in the item's stat block. The item malfunctions as specified in its statistics block even though the stated triggering condition was not met.

Stability Check Results

1 or Lower: The item malfunctions and then detonates, dealing fire damage to you and each creature adjacent to you. The damage equals 1d8 for every five levels of the item (level 1-5, 1d8; 6-10, 2d8; 11-15, 3d8; and so on). The item is destroyed.

2-3: The item malfunctions and then detonates, dealing 1d6 thunder damage to you for every five levels of the item. The item is destroyed.

4-5: The item malfunctions and then is rendered permanently useless.

6-7: The item malfunctions.

8-9: The item does nothing.

10: The item operates normally and then malfunctions.

11-15: The item operates normally.

16-17: The item operates normally. The next time you activate the item, you do not need to make a stability check to operate it.

18 or Higher: The item operates normally. If you are using the item to make an attack that hits, the attack is automatically a critical hit.

Keeping Items Operational: Although the devices presented here are likely significantly different from those that adventurers are used to dealing with, a DM might rule that a character with arcane skills can help to keep devices working. Once per day, a character who has training in Arcana can make an Arcana check at a hard DC of the item's level to try to keep an item operational. If the check is successful, the item's stability rating increases by 2 for 24 hours.

Item Descriptions

Twelve of the technological marvels that Kzunt salvaged from the Barrier Peaks are spotlighted below, along with information a concerned buyer will want to know.

Powered Armor

Do not be alarmed: This is not a creature of metal that we have captured. In fact, it has more in common with the armor your paladin friend over there is wearing. It provides ample protection in battle, and it grants its wearer the ability to see invisible foes and even to fly as if completely weightless. If you decide to purchase the item, make sure that I properly instruct you on how to release the helmet. That was quite embarrassing the first time, let me tell you!

Powered Armor Level 10+ Rare

The armor appears to have been worked to create the illusion of a heavily muscled humanoid.

Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp
Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp			

Armor: Plate

Enhancement Bonus: AC

Properties

- ✦ You can seal or unseal the armor as a minor action. While sealed, the armor provides 8 hours of breathable air. Once the air is used up, it replenishes after 6 hours.
- ✦ You gain blindsight and tremorsense, with a range equal to the armor's enhancement bonus.
- ✦ Your Strength score is considered 5 points higher for the purposes of determining encumbrance.
- ✦ *Malfunction:* When you roll a 1 on an attack roll, you are restrained and begin suffocating. You or an adjacent ally can use a standard action to make an Athletics check (hard DC of the item's level) to end this effect. You cannot seal or unseal the armor until this effect ends

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Minor Action)

Effect: You gain a fly speed equal to your speed until the end of your next turn.

Blaster Rifle

Kzunt's original group thought this was an advanced mirror that was able to fold out and enable you to see behind you. The group used it to look around corners before advancing into a new room, until the party's rogue insisted that the ranger extend the mirror all the way so he could get a close shave in the morning. Unfortunately for him, the rogue received a closer shave than he had asked for when a solid blast of flame projected from the "mirror." Further experimentation led to finding multiple settings for firing the mirror. Just to be sure, none of the companions shaved for the rest of the expedition.

Blaster Rifle Level 9+ Rare

This item consists of jointed metal rods, a curved metal plate, a hardened leather band, and a pane of glass framed and mounted on the end of a rod.

Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+9	2,625,000 gp
Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp			

Weapon: Bow
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 fire and necrotic damage per plus

Property

✦ This weapon requires no ammunition and cannot use ammunition.

✦ *Malfunction:* When you roll a 1 on an attack roll with this weapon, you take necrotic damage equal to twice the weapon's level, and you are dazed (save ends).

Attack Power (Necrotic) ✦ **Daily** (Standard Action)

Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); weapon's level + 3 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d8 necrotic damage, and the target is stunned until the end of your next turn.

Level 14 or 19: 3d8 necrotic damage.

Level 24 or 29: 4d8 necrotic damage.

Attack Power (Fire) ✦ **At-Will** (Standard Action)

Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); weapon's level + 3 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d8 fire damage.

Level 14 or 19: 3d8 fire damage.

Level 24 or 29: 4d8 fire damage.

Chainsaw Sword

Please be careful with that, especially the edges. This combination of blade and rotating, razor-sharp chain is dangerous to handle without proper training. You see, one of my assistants, a rough, charred-smelling fellow, improperly handled one and lost one of his hands. He didn't let the loss impede his burgeoning adventuring career, however. He attached a *chainsaw sword* to where his hand used to be and wielded another weapon in the other hand. I hear the dear boy has gone off to fight the undead. Of course, you could just choose to hold the device, and keep your hands, but I'm told that's not nearly as "groovy."

Chainsaw Sword Level 4+ Rare

A series of rings and chains line the blade. These chains begin to move on their own after a few pulls of a loose string attached to the hilt.

Lvl 4	+1	840 gp	Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp
Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp

Weapon: Heavy blade
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus

Properties

✦ This weapon deals 1[W] extra damage to undead, and only half damage to constructs.

✦ *Malfunction:* When you roll a 1 on an attack roll with this weapon, you take ongoing 10 damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

Level 14 or 19: Ongoing 15 damage.

Level 24 or 29: Ongoing 20 damage.

Attack Power ✦ **Encounter** (No Action)

Trigger: You hit a creature with a melee attack using this weapon.

Effect: The creature takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Level 14 or 19: Ongoing 10 damage.

Level 24 or 29: Ongoing 15 damage.

USING OMEGA TECH

Many *Gamma World*™ Omega Tech items would work well as items recovered from the Barrier Peaks. If you'd like to include some as items in your game using the rules given in this article, here's a quick conversion guide:

✦ The stability bonus for items is +2 for common ones, +0 for uncommon ones, and -2 for rare ones. (Consult the rarity icon on the item's card.)

✦ The malfunction effect is the same as the miss effect (if any) but targeted at the user. Otherwise, the GM should invent an appropriate malfunction.

Laser Pistol

I can see you've spotted one of the common items recovered from the Barrier Peaks. Although it looks like a wristband, this device operates much like a crossbow. As you can see, however, it requires neither string nor bolt to use. In some ways, it is close to a common *wand of magic missiles*, only it features what one of my wizards called a "point and click in-their-face." You simply aim this device toward your opponent, click the trigger (just like a crossbow), and energy hits him or her in the face. Simple, no?

Laser Pistol — Level 5+ Rare

This item resembles a heavy wristband that sports two projections. One ends in a black leather grip, the other in a smooth, cone-shaped red jewel.

Lvl 5	+1	1,000 gp	Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp
Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp

Weapon: Crossbow
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus

Property

✦ This weapon requires no ammunition and cannot use ammunition.
✦ *Malfunction:* When you roll a 1 on an attack roll with this weapon, you instead attack a random target (including yourself) within 5 squares of you.

Attack Power (Fire) ✦ **At-Will** (Standard Action)

Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); weapon's level + 3 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 fire damage.
Level 15 or 20: 3d8 fire damage.
Level 25 or 30: 4d8 fire damage.

Needler Pistol

I would not try to drink that if I were you, madam. Its shape might bring to mind a potion vial, but the last customer who attempted to drink from it was quite surprised to find a number of piercings in his head where he did not have them before, and he caused quite a bit of damage to my tent! I hear, however, that upon returning to his country, he kicked off quite a new fashion trend. Now all the nobles are trying to find appropriately sized metal needles to insert into their noses.

Needler Pistol — Level 7+ Rare

This odd device looks like a potion bottle or a flask that is strapped to a number of tubes.

Lvl 7	+2	2,600 gp	Lvl 22	+5	325,000 gp
Lvl 12	+3	13,000 gp	Lvl 27	+6	1,625,000 gp
Lvl 17	+4	65,000 gp			

Weapon: Hand crossbow
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus

Property

✦ This weapon requires no ammunition and cannot use ammunition.
✦ *Malfunction:* When you roll a 1 on an attack roll with this weapon, you take damage equal to the weapon's level, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Level 12 or 17: Ongoing 10 damage.
Level 22 or 27: Ongoing 15 damage.

Attack Power ✦ **At-Will** (Standard Action)

Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); weapon's level +3 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Level 12 or 17: 3d8 damage, and ongoing 10 damage.
Level 22 or 27: 4d8 damage, and ongoing 15 damage.

Confusion Ray

Initially, the expedition to the Barrier Peaks assumed that this item, a spinning disk at the end of a pole, was a cutting implement of some kind. The group's elf attempted to use it on a foe. Moments after he flipped the switch on the device, he took off all his clothes, tried to use his bow as a hat, and recited a limerick about Corellon's feet.

Confusion Ray — Level 10+ Rare

A metal pole, about 1 foot long, ends in a spinning, multicolored disk. A switch on the end of the pole controls the spinning rate of the disk, and this switch is warm to the touch.

Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp
Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp			

Implement: Wand
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 psychic damage per plus

Property

Malfunction: When you roll a 1 on an attack roll with this wand, you are dominated by the target of the attack against whom you rolled the 1 until the end of your next turn.

Attack Power (Charm, Psychic) ✦ **At-Will** (Standard Action)

Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); wand's level + 3 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). Until this effect ends, you can use a free action at the start of each of your turns to slide the target up to 5 squares.
Level 15 or 20: 3d6 psychic damage.
Level 25 or 30: 4d6 psychic damage.

Blue Communicator

You might think that you should put this blue item in your mouth. Do not do so. We have discovered that you should place this piece in your ear. Through it, you can communicate over long distances with someone from your group. You merely have to command it, and it shall put you in touch. You just have to be careful that you're speaking to one of your fellow adventurers, and not accidentally giving something away to one of your foes.

And, seriously, I know it looks like it goes there, but do not stick it in your mouth.

Blue Communicator Level 2 Rare

This glowing blue device resembles a tooth. Do not place it in your mouth.

Head Slot 520 gp

Utility Power ✦ At-Will (Minor Action)

Effect: Speak the name of a willing creature within 20 squares of you. Roll a d20. On a result of 2-20, the creature can hear you speak as if you were adjacent to it. This effect lasts until you use this power again.

Malfunction: On a result of 1, you do not speak to the intended creature, but instead speak to a random creature within 20 squares of you.

Jet Pack

This is one of my favorite items. No longer is flame-powered flight the province of dragons alone. This item attaches like a backpack, and it projects flame underneath it to propel you directly upward—perfect for reaching the next slope. I assure you, the first time you try it, you'll squeal with delight as you ascend into the sky, and you won't even miss such things as steering or a way to land. Have I ever tried it? No, I leave that to brave adventurers such as you.

Jet Pack Level 7 Rare

A metallic pack clasps around one's middle, and it projects flame directly underneath the wearer.

Waist Slot 2,600 gp

Utility Power ✦ At-Will (Move Action)

Effect: You fly 2d10 squares upward, and then fall.

Malfunction: If you roll a 1 on each d10, you fly 1d10 squares in a random direction. You take 2d10 damage and stop moving if you collide with anything.

Gray Security Card

Kzunt has related many stories about the colored doors that separated the various chambers within the Barrier Peaks. Finding different-colored cards that magically opened the doors proved to be critical to exploring the various rooms. This ashen-gray card, recovered from one of the more violent guardian golems, allows access to any door, not simply the ones within the Barrier Peaks. Be careful with this miraculous key because, unlike the keys we are accustomed to, this one can unlock many unlikely things, including the belt you're wearing!

Gray Security Card Level 6 Rare

This gray rectangle resembles a heavy leaded pane of colored glass.

Wondrous Item 1,800 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Standard Action)

Effect: You make a Thievery check to unlock a door or other locked object. The check is made with a +20 power bonus instead of your normal check bonus.

Malfunction: If you roll a 1 on this check, all the clothing and armor that you are wearing falls off you.

Wheely Sled

This wheeled platform is activated by using levers on its sides, and these levers also control steering. Our attempts to use it as a new method of conveyance for cargo have not worked out to our satisfaction. For proper operation, one must lie down on the platform to steer it.

One of our enthusiastic dwarf testers attempted to use two at once, one on each foot, with rope attached to both levers to enable steering. After a series of successful rides, the tester decided to add a small ramp to see if the platforms could be used to travel over rivers and other obstacles. Although the jump from the ramp was successful, the tester discovered that such an action causes the steering to lock, and he was propelled him at top speed toward a nearby waterfall. At that point, he discovered that the safety ropes he had tied to himself did not have their intended effect.

Wheely Sled Level 4 Rare

This sheet of solid metal sits on four wheels and is long enough for one person to lie down on it. A number of levers and switches are accessible from the sides.

Wondrous Item 840 gp

Utility Power ✦ At-Will (Move Action)

Requirement: You must be lying on the sled.

Effect: Roll a d20. On a result of 2-20, you move up to 10 squares over the ground, ignoring difficult terrain.

Malfunction: On a result of 1, you move 5 squares in a random direction and fall prone in a square adjacent to the sled.

Singularity Grenade

One of the wondrous objects unable to be recovered from the Barrier Peaks was a magic glass that was capable of scrying and answering questions. When the voice within the magic glass was asked to identify this object I now hold before you, the voice referred to the item as a "single larity." We know not what a larity is, or why there is only a single larity and not multiple larities, but we assume that this device summons one to fight for you. We suspect that only one larity is enough to turn the tide of battle.

Singularity Grenade Level 11 Rare

The size of a large fruit, this device is a polished white color, as if made of ivory. In the center is a hole made of pure blackness that seems to spin.

Consumable 350 gp

Attack Power (Cold, Thunder) ✦ **Consumable** (Standard Action)

Attack: Area burst 2d3 - 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +14 vs. Fortitude

Malfunction: If you roll a 1 on one or more of the attack rolls, you teleport to the center of the burst, or the nearest unoccupied square, and the attack hits you.

Hit: Roll 1d4. Then roll that many d4s. Then roll that many d4s and total the result. Each target takes cold and thunder damage equal to the result.

Miss: Half damage.

Special: If you score a critical hit with this attack, no damage dice are maximized.

Sleep Grenade

At great expense, we hired a team of goblins to investigate a number of similarly shaped metallic-colored fruits. The first goblin showed us that, under no circumstances, should anyone attempt to eat one of them. The second goblin was instructed to depress a protrusion on the fruit's exterior while holding onto it, and the creature promptly collapsed. The third goblin was ordered to toss the device a safe distance away from itself after activating it. The fourth through seventh determined that the "safe distance" was a much wider area than expected.

Sleep Grenade Level 11 Rare

This device is about the size of a large apple, with indentations all around that are suitable for grasping.

Consumable 350 gp

Attack Power (Charm) ✦ **Consumable** (Standard Action)

Attack: Area burst 2d3 - 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +14 vs. Will.

Malfunction: If you roll a 1 on an attack roll with this grenade, you fall unconscious (save ends).

Hit: The target is slowed (save ends).

First Failed Saving Throw: The target is instead unconscious (save ends).

About the Author

Dave Chalker is the editor-in-chief of Critical-Hits.com; a freelance game designer who has worked on "Rumble in the Valley" in *Dungeon* 193, "Class Acts: Secrets of the Ninja Assassin" in *Dragon* 404, and "Back Alley Dice Games" in *Dragon* 409, and has served as a developer on *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying* from Margaret Weis Productions. Dave would like to thank Gary Gygax for creating *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*, and he is pretty sure that if he had played it with Gary, Dave's character would have been killed while attempting to rescue the innocent-looking bunny.

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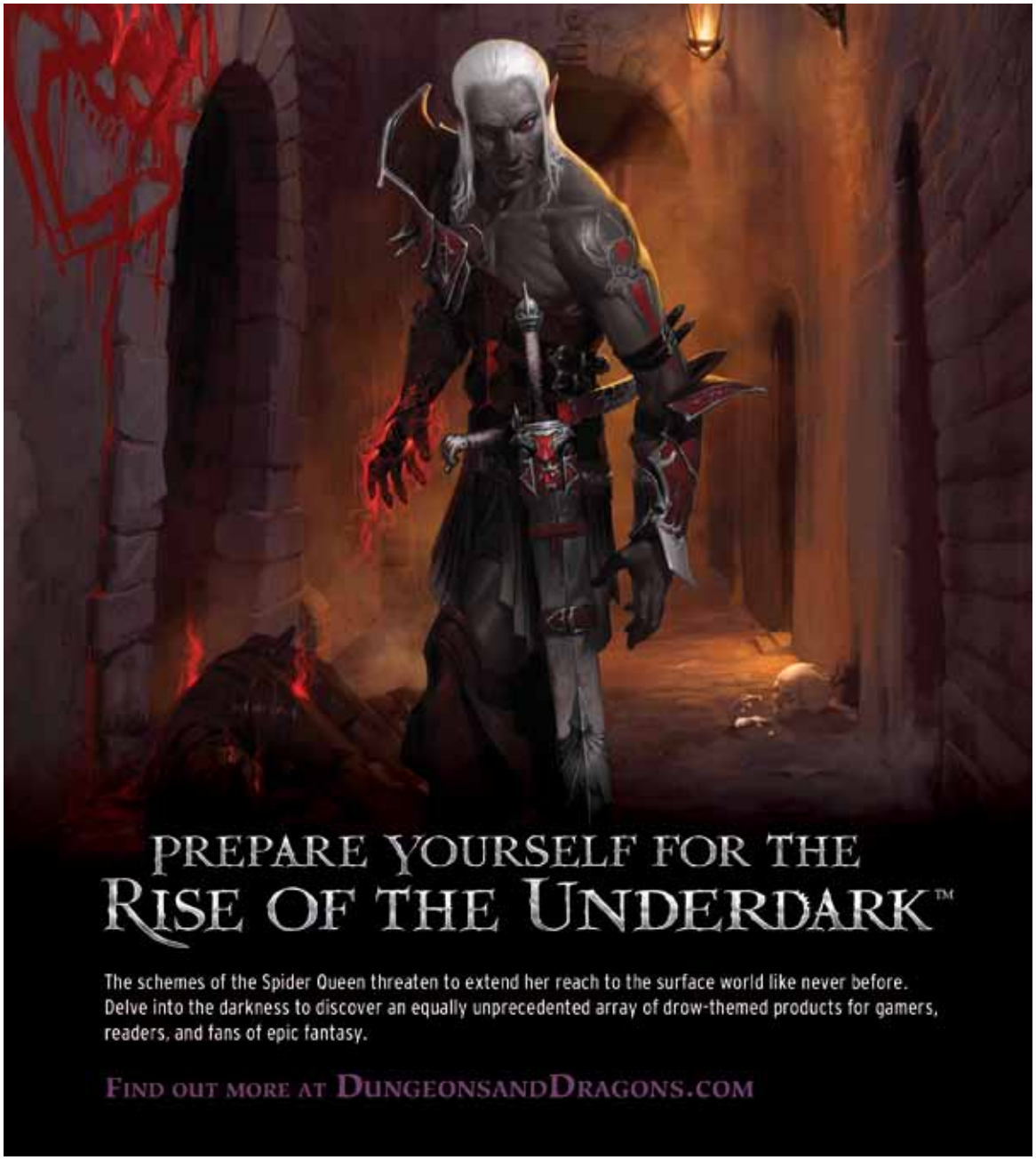
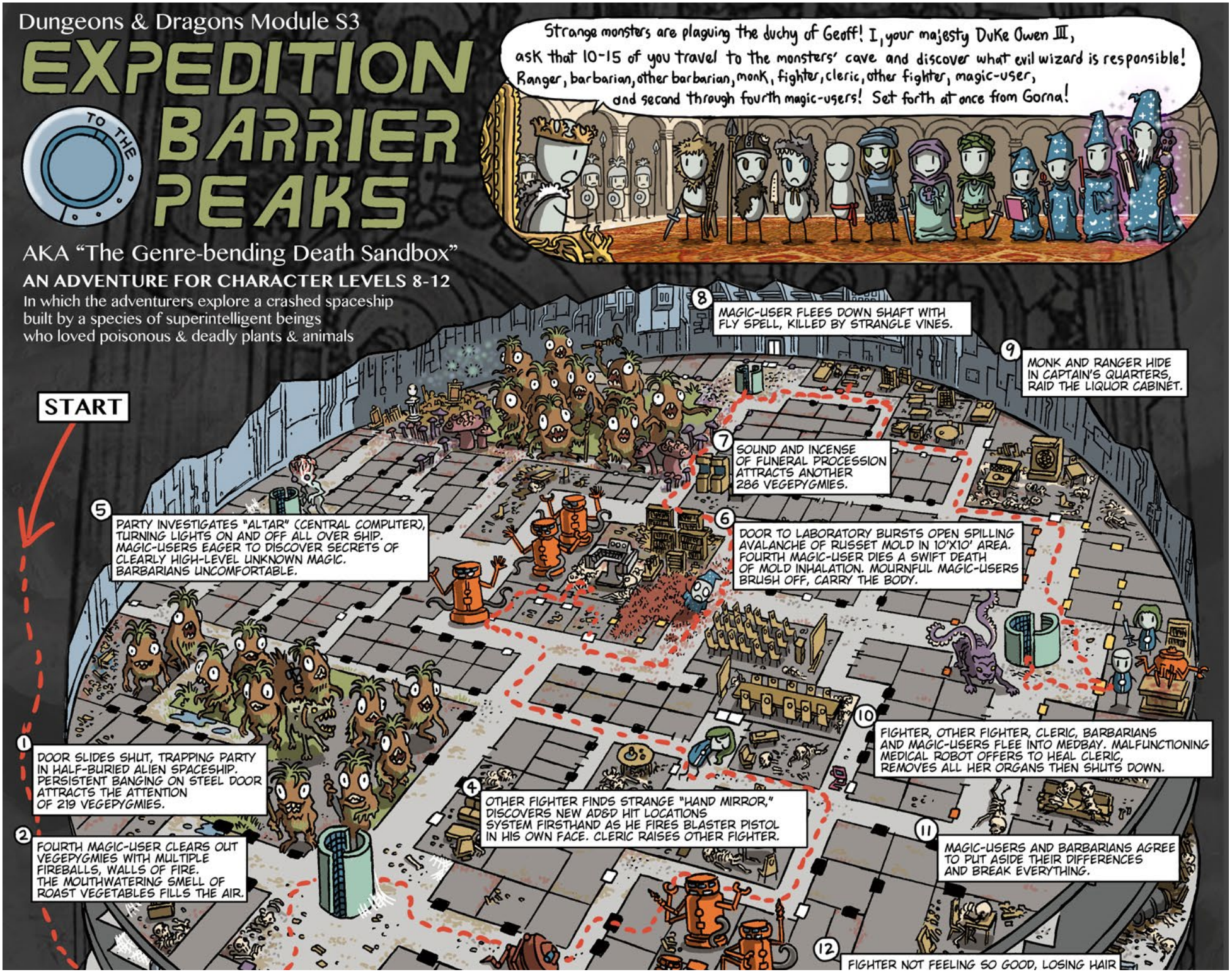
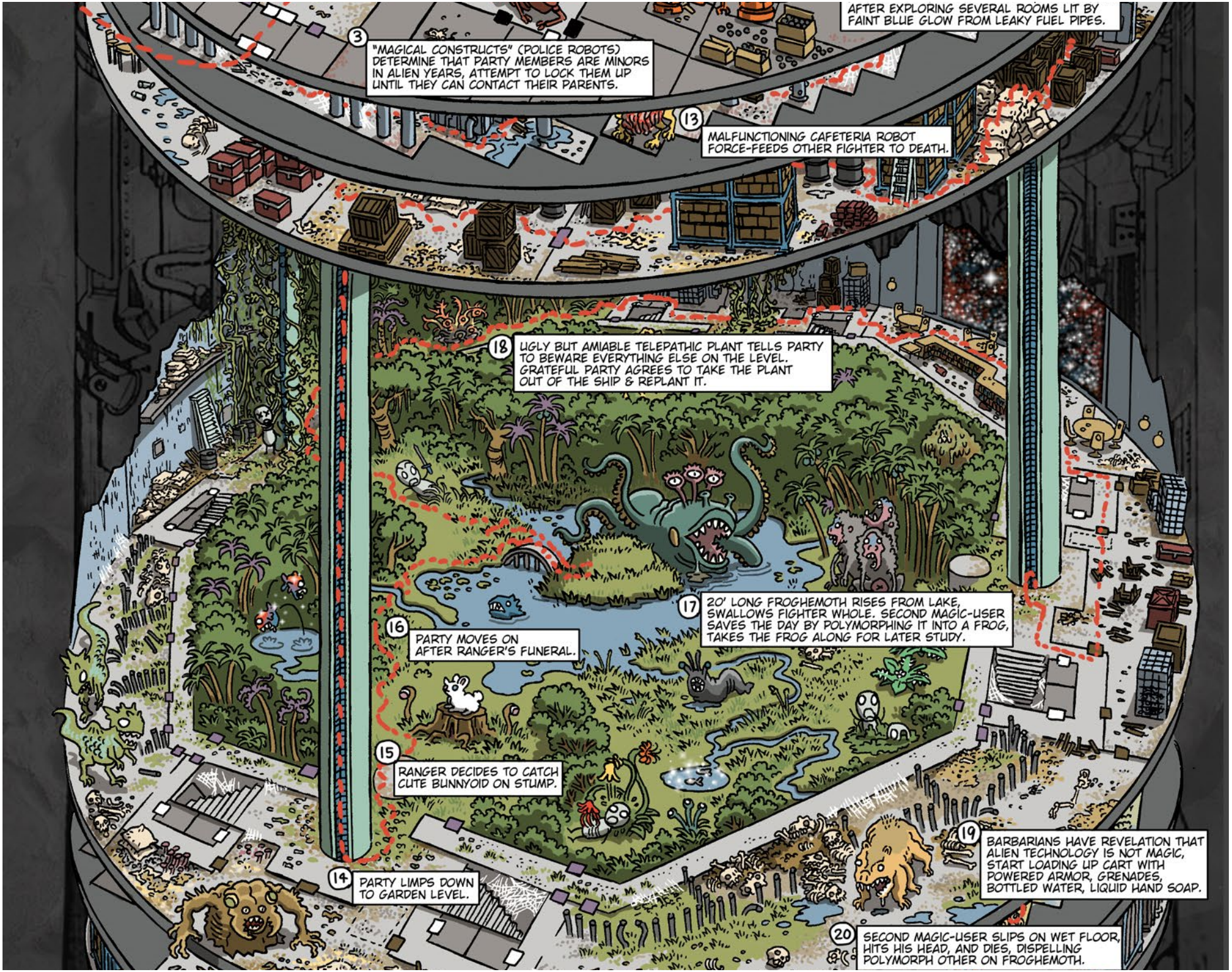
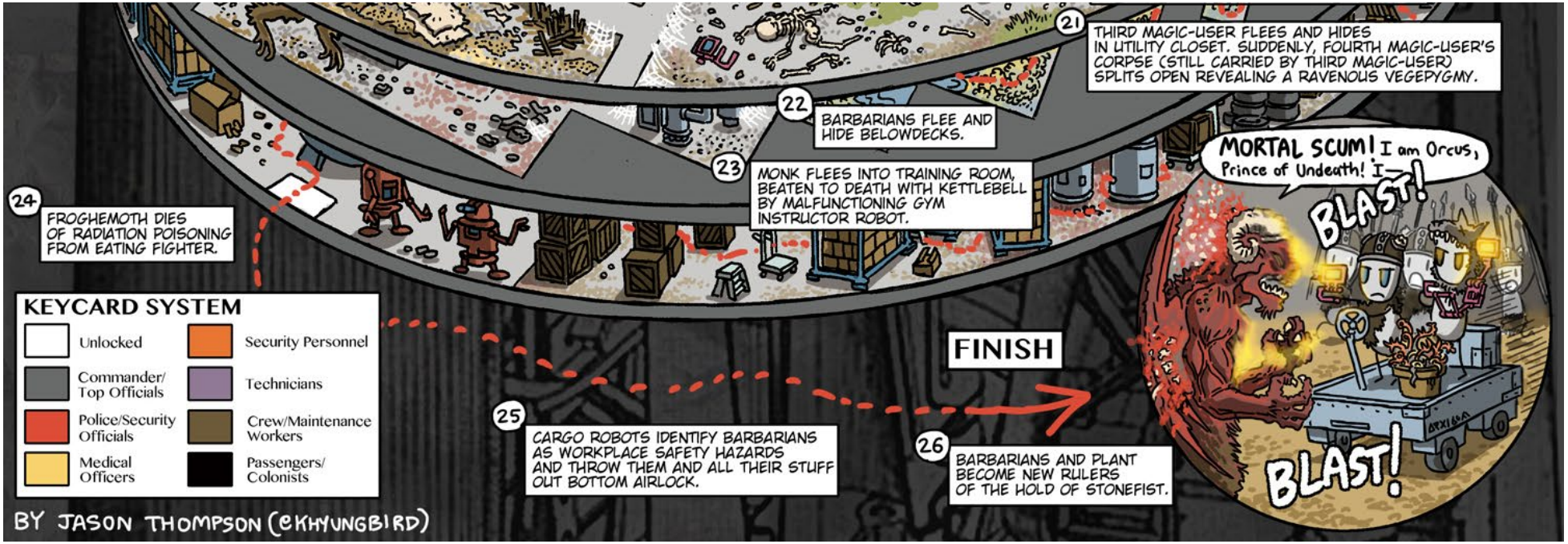



Dungeons & Dragons Module S3
EXPEDITION TO THE BARRIER PEAKS
AKA "The Genre-bending Death Sandbox"
AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTER LEVELS 8-12
In which the adventurers explore a crashed spaceship built by a species of superintelligent beings who loved poisonous & deadly plants & animals
Strange monsters are plaguing the duchy of Geoff! I, your majesty Duke Owen III, ask that 10-15 of you travel to the monsters' cave and discover what evil wizard is responsible! Ranger, barbarian, other barbarian, monk, fighter, cleric, other fighter, magic-user, and second through fourth magic-users! Set forth at once from Gorna!
START
1 DOOR SLIDES SHUT, TRAPPING PARTY IN HALF-BURIED ALIEN SPACESHIP. PERSISTENT BANGING ON STEEL DOOR ATTRACTS THE ATTENTION OF 219 VEGEPYGMIES.
2 FOURTH MAGIC-USER CLEARS OUT VEGEPYGMIES WITH MULTIPLE FIREBALLS, WALLS OF FIRE. THE MOUTHWATERING SMELL OF ROAST VEGETABLES FILLS THE AIR.
4 OTHER FIGHTER FINDS STRANGE "HAND MIRROR," DISCOVERS NEW AD&D HIT LOCATIONS SYSTEM FIRSTHAND AS HE FIRES BLASTER PISTOL IN HIS OWN FACE. CLERIC RAISES OTHER FIGHTER.
5 PARTY INVESTIGATES "ALTAR" (CENTRAL COMPUTER), TURNING LIGHTS ON AND OFF ALL OVER SHIP. MAGIC-USERS EAGER TO DISCOVER SECRETS OF CLEARLY HIGH-LEVEL UNKNOWN MAGIC. BARBARIANS UNCOMFORTABLE.
6 DOOR TO LABORATORY BURSTS OPEN SPILLING AVALANCHE OF RUSSET MOLD IN 10'X10' AREA. FOURTH MAGIC-USER DIES A SWIFT DEATH OF MOLD INHALATION. MOURNFUL MAGIC-USERS BRUSH OFF, CARRY THE BODY.
7 SOUND AND INCENSE OF FUNERAL PROCESSION ATTRACTS ANOTHER 286 VEGEPYGMIES.
8 MAGIC-USER FLEES DOWN SHAFT WITH FLY SPELL, KILLED BY STRANGLE VINES.
9 MONK AND RANGER HIDE IN CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS, RAID THE LIQUOR CABINET.
10 FIGHTER, OTHER FIGHTER, CLERIC, BARBARIANS AND MAGIC-USERS FLEE INTO MEDBAY. MALFUNCTIONING MEDICAL ROBOT OFFERS TO HEAL CLERIC, REMOVES ALL HER ORGANS THEN SHUTS DOWN.
11 MAGIC-USERS AND BARBARIANS AGREE TO PUT ASIDE THEIR DIFFERENCES AND BREAK EVERYTHING.
12 FIGHTER NOT FEELING SO GOOD, LOSING HAIR


AFTER EXPLORING SEVERAL ROOMS LIT BY FAINT BLUE GLOW FROM LEAKY FUEL PIPES.
3
"MAGICAL CONSTRUCTS" (POLICE ROBOTS) DETERMINE THAT PARTY MEMBERS ARE MINORS IN ALIEN YEARS, ATTEMPT TO LOCK THEM UP UNTIL THEY CAN CONTACT THEIR PARENTS.
13
MALFUNCTIONING CAFETERIA ROBOT FORCE-FEEDS OTHER FIGHTER TO DEATH.
18
UGLY BUT AMIABLE TELEPATHIC PLANT TELLS PARTY TO BEWARE EVERYTHING ELSE ON THE LEVEL. GRATEFUL PARTY AGREES TO TAKE THE PLANT OUT OF THE SHIP & REPLANT IT.
17
20' LONG FROGHEMOTH RISES FROM LAKE, SWALLOWS FIGHTER WHOLE. SECOND MAGIC-USER SAVES THE DAY BY POLYMORPHING IT INTO A FROG, TAKES THE FROG ALONG FOR LATER STUDY.
16
PARTY MOVES ON AFTER RANGER'S FUNERAL.
15
RANGER DECIDES TO CATCH CUTE BUNNYOID ON STUMP.
14
PARTY LIMPS DOWN TO GARDEN LEVEL.
19
BARBARIANS HAVE REVELATION THAT ALIEN TECHNOLOGY IS NOT MAGIC, START LOADING UP CART WITH POWERED ARMOR, GRENADES, BOTTLED WATER, LIQUID HAND SOAP.
20
SECOND MAGIC-USER SLIPS ON WET FLOOR, HITS HIS HEAD, AND DIES, DISPELLING POLYMORPH OTHER ON FROGHEMOTH.


21
THIRD MAGIC-USER FLEES AND HIDES IN UTILITY CLOSET. SUDDENLY, FOURTH MAGIC-USER'S CORPSE (STILL CARRIED BY THIRD MAGIC-USER) SPLITS OPEN REVEALING A RAVENOUS VEGEPYGMY.
22
BARBARIANS FLEE AND HIDE BELOWDECKS.
23
MONK FLEES INTO TRAINING ROOM, BEATEN TO DEATH WITH KETTLEBELL BY MALFUNCTIONING GYM INSTRUCTOR ROBOT.
24
FROGHEMOTH DIES OF RADIATION POISONING FROM EATING FIGHTER.
KEYCARD SYSTEM
Unlocked
Security Personnel
Commander/ Top Officials
Technicians
Police/Security Officials
Crew/Maintenance Workers
Medical Officers
Passengers/ Colonists
FINISH
25
CARGO ROBOTS IDENTIFY BARBARIANS AS WORKPLACE SAFETY HAZARDS AND THROW THEM AND ALL THEIR STUFF OUT BOTTOM AIRLOCK.
26
BARBARIANS AND PLANT BECOME NEW RULERS OF THE HOLD OF STONEFIST.
MORTAL SCUM! I am Orcus, Prince of Undeath! I—
BLAST!
BLAST!
BY JASON THOMPSON (@KHYUNGBIRD)

The Best of the DMs Guild

’Tis the season to challenge and delight players in new and festive ways as DMs Guild Adept Shawn Merwin looks at holiday content for your D&D game.

Shawn Merwin

The newest Guild Adept, Ashley Warren, has risen to fame with offerings such as *The Executioner’s Daughter*, *Opuscule of Omens*, *Mordenkainen’s Lost Notebook*, *A Requiem of Wings* series, and many others.

Her latest project is a holiday-themed adventure set in Waterdeep called *Winter’s Splendor*. It’s free to download for the life of this issue of *Dragon+* using the button below.

When did you first start playing Dungeons & Dragons?

I've had a passion for fantasy roleplay since I was a young child but I've actually only been playing D&D since 2016. That's not for lack of trying. I had discovered the rulebooks many years before and played the video game *Neverwinter Nights* a lot, but never had the opportunity to play in real life or even see how it all worked. Some of my research in grad school focused on RPGs so I was aware of it in the periphery of my geeky interests. When the opportunity arose to start a game with my close friends I was ecstatic and fell in love as soon as I rolled the first die.

The game fulfils several needs: to express myself in a safe environment; to challenge my values and outlook on the world; to get to know my friends on a deeper level; to indulge in geekery; and to craft communal stories. Fantasy literature has always been my refuge—I was bullied pretty terribly as a child and was always able to keep my head above water thanks to the stories I loved and cherished. Stories empowered me. D&D continues to do that for me as I get older. It's a reminder of who I am and what I love and is a constant source of inspiration and self-expression.

What game design projects you have worked on? And do you have a favorite?

This year has been a complete whirlwind. I've been fortunate to work on so many incredible projects! I pour all of myself into everything, even small projects. My favorite projects were the ones that caused me the most anxiety but ultimately pushed me to grow as a writer. Independently, I've enjoyed bringing my celestials-versus-fiends series, *A Requiem of Wings*, to life. That's a story I've had in my head for a long time and it's been great to be able to tell it using D&D. Since I am fairly new to playing D&D, I've spent a lot of time studying classic modules. From those studies came *The Ring of the Battle Maiden*, a classic-inspired one-shot that I really enjoyed creating. I also tried to experiment with solo adventures and released *The Executioner's Daughter*. This has somehow become my most

popular adventure, even though I almost didn't release it because I wasn't sure if people liked or wanted solo adventures. It turns out, they do.

Collaboratively, I've worked with some amazing people this year, including projects for P.B. Publishing and Poison Potion Press. Writing an Eberron adventure for *Embers of the Last War* was an honor. Although I only played a small part in *Durnan's Guide to Tavernkeeping* that was a blast since I got to indulge my love of medieval food, culture, and music. Truthfully, I am still a little star-struck when working on any project with the Guild Adept team.

What can you tell us about your latest project, *Winter's Splendor*?
I had originally planned to write a retelling of *The Nutcracker* for the holidays but Chris Lindsay approached me with this idea and I was like, "OMG, yes!" That's what usually happens when Chris ropes me into any project.

Without spoiling the adventure too much this is a festive mystery set in Waterdeep, featuring my absolute favorite villains from *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*. Toys and music play a prominent role—as do fiends, of course. I'm fond of stories about a haunted Christmas, such as *A Christmas Carol* or *Nightmare Before Christmas*. A hint of darkness helps heighten the lightness and warmth of the season.

This adventure is infused with everything I love: winter, festivities, folklore, puzzles, music, girls being haunted by fiends… you know, the good stuff.

What are the challenges and rewards of writing a holiday-themed adventure?
I always want to pull from real-world holidays without translating that too literally. Sometimes it's hard to extract an idea from its context. For example, if I include a dreidel in the story it loses the meaning and history tied to the holiday from which it originates. So little things like that can be tricky to figure out.

Yet I do feel that the rewards overrule the challenges. Writing about holidays is one of my favorite story hooks. I tend to emphasize atmosphere in all of my adventures and the holiday atmosphere really lends itself to that approach. Much of it was heavily inspired by

Eastern European holiday markets and traditions.

Waterdeep is also such a wonderful setting already since there is so much lore to pull from. I aspired to create something fun, festive, and fantastical, with just a touch of trickery. I hope I've accomplished that and it helps gaming groups have a memorable holiday experience.

WINTER'S SPLENDOR

DESIGN THOUGHTS: HOLIDAYS, REAL AND IMAGINED

Among the various design elements that go into publishing a D&D offering on the DMs Guild, theme can be one of the most important. Theme is the glue that holds your design together, whether you are creating adventures, class features, monsters, items, backgrounds, spells, or other rules.

The magic of holidays—either real or imagined—is that they are all highly thematic. Many are celebratory, a few are mournful, and some are a little of both. Holidays are ripe with symbols, traditions, tropes, emotions, and expectations. Those aspects of holidays are invaluable to maintaining a tight and flavorful design.

Real-world holidays are wonderful for leveraging themes and they can also be useful in creating your own holidays and celebrations in a fictional world. What actions might characters be asked to carry out for a holiday that celebrates the birthday of a revered monarch in one nation? How does that contrast with the heroes' action on a mandatory holiday ordered by a much-hated, tyrannical leader? How would a holiday celebrating a sun god like Lathander differ from the holiday revering a death god like Kelemvor?

As you design your own worlds and adventures within those worlds, think about holidays. What is their significance within the culture? What might go wrong on such days, and how can the adventurers right those wrongs in a way that reinforces the theme of the holiday.

HAPPY DEADLY HOLIDAYS

For those living in the colder climes of Faerûn's northern hemisphere, the winter holidays are a welcome respite from the cold and snow. One of the most prolific DMs Guild authors, J.V.C. Parry, offers the frost-tinged adventure *Winter Yonderland* for characters of levels 5-10 which captures those harsh environs well. Having upset a powerful being, as adventurers often do, they find themselves in a strange inn in an even stranger town. The townsfolk beg the characters to look into the fate of children gone missing during holiday festivities. What follows is a deadly jaunt into the wilds of their strange new surroundings… and hopefully redemption!

LEARN MORE

DESIGN THOUGHT: HOLIDAY JUXTAPOSITIONS

Drama lives in the chaos of conflict. Holidays, especially the ones that take place in the winter months, are teeming with conflicting traditions, emotions, and settings. For every nice child hoping for gifts from Santa's fur-trimmed bag there is a naughty one in Krampus's rough sack. The New Year offers hope to those who have suffered during the previous months. Themes of life and death, hope and redemption, good and evil: these all weave their way through the holiday and solstice stories and traditions around the world.

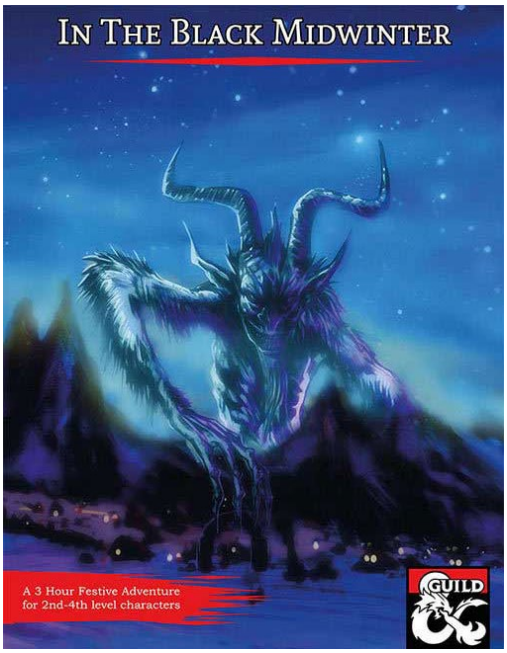
As true as that is for the stories of our holidays in the real world, so it can also be for your fantasy holiday adventures. The cute toys are all the more terrifying when they attack and turn deadly; the townsfolk are the most vulnerable when they are turning their thoughts to the hopes of the season. When the nights are longest, the skies darkest, and the air coldest, heroes are needed more than ever to shine their lights upon the innocents who need their help.

As you design your own adventures, always keep those juxtapositions and dichotomies in mind. That one small detail—the mistletoe tacked to the door of the lonely hermit, the holly wreathes blessed by a druid to guard against the winter monsters, or the elf with the pen and

parchment lurking at the edge of town and noting everyone's deeds—could be the difference between a good adventure and a great one.

OTHER PRODUCTS

In the Black Midwinter by Simon Perrins
Price: $2.99
This adventure for characters of levels two to four sees the adventurers battling an ancient evil that threatens innocents in the frozen north. While traveling as part of a mission, the characters are pointed towards an abandoned town by Midwinter's Ghost. To survive they must solve the mystery of what happened in the town, fight evil creatures such as the julbocken and the Blizzard King, and live to tell the tale following their interactions with the most festively diabolical magic item: the *Deck of Merry Things*!



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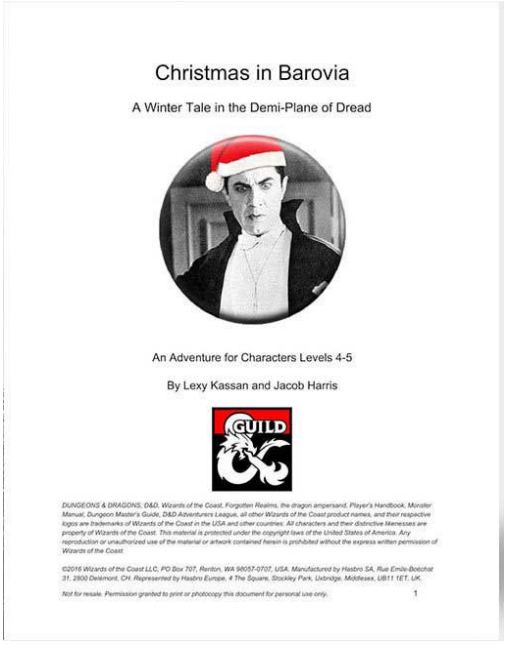
MORE INFO

Christmas in Barovia by Lexy Kassan and Jacob Harris
Price: $1.00
Everything in the *Ravenloft* setting is a twisted version of its normal self so why should Christmas be any different? This clever and deadly adventure is steeped in Eastern European traditions and even comes with suggestions for a soundtrack to accompany your game. In Barovia the townsfolk who have been "naughty" fear the



Christmas in Barovia

A Winter Tale in the Demi-Plane of Dread

An Adventure for Characters Levels 4-5

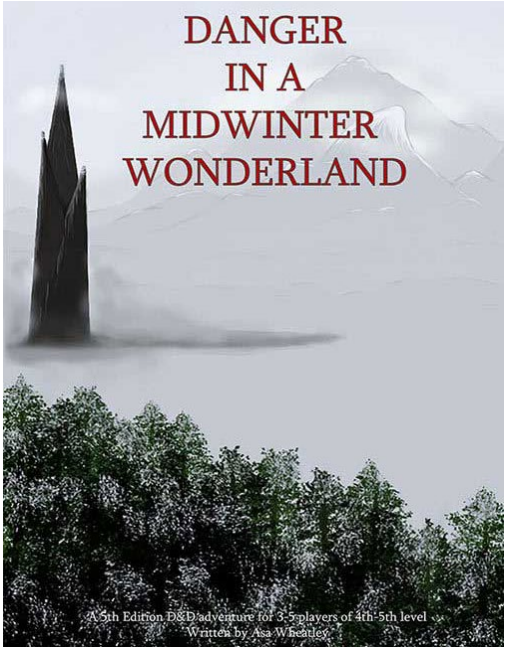
By Lexy Kassan and Jacob Harris

(Select to view)

coming of the eleven Visitors, who punish the wicked. Survive the eleven days of the Visitors and they can revel on the twelfth night. And woe betide any characters who find themselves on the naughty list…

MORE INFO

Danger in a Midwinter Wonderland by Asa Wheatley
Price: $1.99



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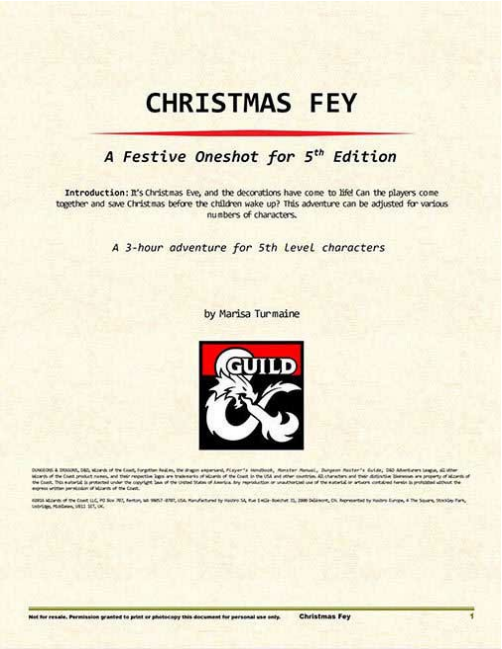
Every year the Midwinter holiday is launched with the lighting of the Noel Isles, where Winter's Father and his dedicated toy makers ply their trade and lead the celebrations. When that lighting doesn't happen, the world wonders if something is wrong. Add in rumors that the toy makers have started attacking people, and adventurers must step forward to save the day. This is a cute adventure with a dark side, which includes monster stats for Krampus, winter orcs, and toy makers, as well as magic items such as *healing candy* and the *Midwinter*

exploding cracker.

MORE INFO

Christmas Fey by Marisa Turmaine
Price: Pay What You Want ($2.00 Suggested Price)
One might imagine that being a dedicated helper of Saint Nick on Christmas Eve is extremely busy. The night turns from busy to terrifying when the Spirit of Christmas reports that the big jolly guy is under attack by animated Christmas tree decorations. The characters must fight their way to the top of the tree, defeat the tree-topping monster, and ensure the gifts get delivered on time. This short adventure packs a lot of (holiday) punch!


CHRISTMAS FEY

A Festive Oneshot for 5th Edition

Introduction: It's Christmas Eve, and the decorations have come to life! Can the players come together and save Christmas before the children wake up? This adventure can be adjusted for various numbers of characters.

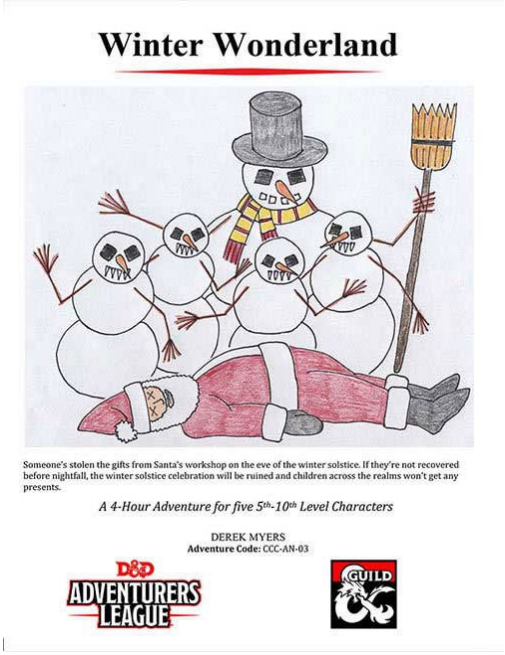
A 3-hour adventure for 5th Level characters

by Marisa Turmaine

(Select to view)

MORE INFO

Winter Wonderland by Derek Myers
Price: $4.99
Looking for a little holiday fun that is also legal for D&D Adventurers League play? Look no further than *Winter Wonderland*, a four-hour CCC adventure for characters of levels five to ten. It hits all the holiday high notes: toy-making gnomes, toy soldiers, Jack Frost, killer snowmen, and even Santa himself.


Winter Wonderland

Someone's stolen the gifts from Santa's workshop on the eve of the winter solstice. If they're not recovered before nightfall, the winter solstice celebration will be ruined and children across the realms won't get any presents.

A 4-Hour Adventure for five 5th-10th Level Characters

DEREK MYERS
Adventure Code: CCC-AN-03

MORE INFO

(Select to view)

Game designer and editor Shawn Merwin's professional work on Dungeons & Dragons has ranged from third to fifth edition, showing up in sourcebooks, adventures, articles, and Organized Play administration. His adventure Pudding Faire (co-written with Cindy Moore and Will Doyle) describes a sweet holiday of a different sort. He has written adventures for the D&D Adventurers League and manages convention-created content for Baldman Games.

BACK TO TOP

DDAL00-05

WINTER'S SPLENDOR

You're invited to the Midwinter Gala in the City of Splendors!
Among the jovial festivities, a sinister mystery waits to be unwrapped.
A two-hour holiday adventure for 1st – 4th level characters.

Credits

Designer: Ashley Warren

Editing: Chris Lindsay
D&D Adventurers League Guildmaster: Chris Lindsay

Art Director & Graphic Design: Emi Tanji
Cover Illustrator: Shawn Wood
Interior Illustrators: Mark Behm, Michael Berube, Eric Deschamps, Aaron Hübrich, Slawomir Manlak, Craig J Spearing, Ashley Warren
Cartographer: Dyson Logos

D&D Adventurers League Wizards Team: Adam Lee, Ari Levitch, Chris Lindsay, Mike Mearls

D&D Adventurers League Administrators:
Alan Patrick, Amy Lynn Dzura, Claire Hoffman, Greg Marks, Lysa Chen, Travis Woodall

Acknowledgements: This story is dedicated to my husband, Andrew, and to my DnD group, the Tavern Burners/Höben's Yaros/Dinosaur Liberation Force (DLF). Happy two-year anniversary to my crew! Aria Cavatina was inspired by Kelli Butler, a.k.a. @TheOperaGeek on Twitter.

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ERIC DESCHAMPS

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Adventure Primer

"Not every flickering orange glow is a fire, *darling. What does a little girl like you have to fear?"*

—Ammalia Cassalanter to her daughter, Elzerina

Background

This year's Midwinter Gala is held in Waterdeep's glamorous Sea Ward. The festivities include a bustling outdoor holiday market and special performances at the **CASSALANTER VILLA**, which the Cassalanters have graciously opened to the public for the duration of the holiday.

The pleasant atmosphere is tainted when aasimar opera singer, **ARIA CAVATINA**, is attacked by a tiny fiend that seemingly appears out of nowhere. The City Watch shuts down the event, holding guests in the villa for questioning until the culprit can be identified.

The fiends wreaking havoc on the party are doing the bidding of **ASMODEUS**, who already holds sway over the Casslanters. The devils have been inadvertently summoned by young **ELZERINA CASSALANTER**, with whom Asmodeus has been communicating via her toys. Elzerina does not know that her innocent playtime has invited these devilish creatures into her home.

Will characters be able to crack Asmodeus's puzzle and put a stop to his fiendish meddling? With a villa full of Waterdeep's most prominent citizens and a family with a secret so dark they'll do anything to protect it, mayhem and mystery await this Midwinter!

Episodes

The adventure is spread over three episodes that take approximately two to four hours to play.

- ***Episode 1: Breaking the Ice.*** The Midwinter Gala is in full swing in the Sea Ward. During a performance at Cassalanter Villa, a visiting performer is attacked by a minion of Asmodeus. This is the **Call to Action**.
- ***Episode 2: Where There's Smoke....*** The City Watch shuts down the festivities until the culprit is discovered. Characters can explore the Cassalanter Villa or interact with guests to uncover Asmodeus's plot. This is **Main Objective A**.
- ***Episode 3: Silent Night, Devil's Light.*** Based on their discoveries, the characters find themselves in the City of the Dead facing off against a minion of Asmodeus, and hopefully putting a stop to his meddling. This is **Main Objective B**.

Bonus Objectives

This adventure includes two bonus objectives that the characters can pursue if they have additional time to do so—earning additional advancement checkpoints (but no treasure checkpoints) in the process. These bonus objectives are found in this adventure's appendices, as follows:

- **Bonus Objective A: Voice of an Angel**. Aasimar bard Aria Cavatina needs help completing an ancient song, which is said to conjure a celestial to one's aid. This bonus objective is found in **Appendix 4**.
- **Bonus Objective B: Danse Macabre**. Elzerina Cassalanter possesses a cursed toy that has a strange effect on her. This bonus objective is found in **Appendix 5**.

Episode Sequence

Depending on your time constraints, and play style and environment, this adventure will take approximately two hours to play.

How Will You Play?

The duration of your session depends on how much of this adventure you plan to utilize. At the very least, your session will last approximately two hours. However, if you wish, you can provide a longer experience for your players by presenting the bonus objectives.

Main Objective Only. To complete the adventure's main objective, the characters participate in Episodes 1 through 3 in order.

Bonus Objectives. You can extend this adventure by one or two hours by including opportunities for the characters to pursue the bonus objectives.

These objectives branch off Episode 2 and 3, but their order is fluid—they set the scene for the final episode and may even have an impact on events as they transpire.

A Dark Family Legacy

This adventure prominently features the Cassalanter family, whom characters may have already encountered in *Waterdeep Dragon Heist™*. Ammalia and Victoro Cassalanter are secretly cultists of Asmodeus, but outwardly maintain patronage and devotion to the demigod, Siamorphe, who represents a nobles' divine right to rule. Charitable acts, such as opening their home to Waterdavians for the Midwinter Gala, help the Cassalanters keep up appearances and detract unwanted attention to their more nefarious clandestine activities.

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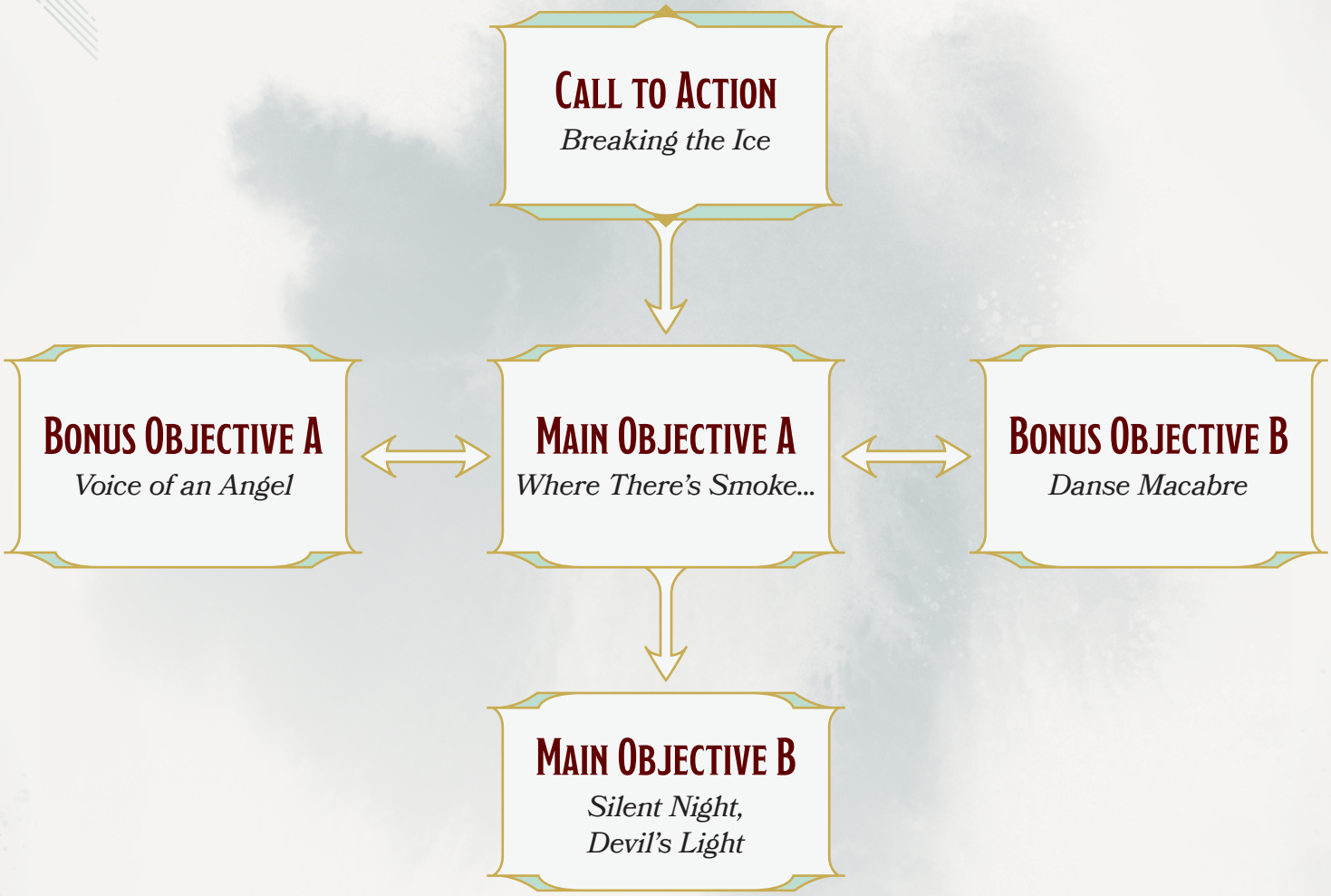
Adventure Flowchart



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Episode 1: Breaking the Ice

Estimated Duration: 20 minutes

Scene A. The Midwinter Market

The adventure begins in the Sea Ward, where the Midwinter Gala is in full swing. To set the scene, read or paraphrase the following.

> Wheels of carriages and drays crunch over the freshly-fallen snow, delivering visitors from across the city to the Sea Ward. Despite the frigid temperature, the atmosphere is warm and jovial. Red velvet-covered tents line Delzorin and Diamond Streets; merchants offer treats and trinkets. The air is filled with the voices of carolers and the scents of spiced pastries and mulled wine.

The Midwinter Gala is an extravagant affair that lasts for a tenday. In the Sea Ward, it is a festive, pleasant scene. Characters can interact with the merchants to purchase seasonal snacks or small gifts.

Area Information

The Sea Ward glitters and gleams during the Midwinter Gala. The streets are crowded with merriment.

Dimensions & Terrain. Delzorin and Diamond Streets are both closed to traffic. The streets have been cleared of snow, but the snow is banked on the sidewalks and the roofs of the villas that line the street. Throughout the day, snow falls in intermittent bursts, adding a fresh coat to the ground.

Lighting. The sunlight is feeble behind snow clouds, but the rays catch the light of the freshly-fallen snow and it is quite bright outside. The light under the tents is dimmer, lit by candles and magic lanterns.

Creatures/NPCs

If characters peruse the midwinter market, they can visit one of the following NPCs.

- **Wizdil** (CG gnome **commoner**) sells cups of mulled wine, ale, or beer for 5 cp. Wizdil staves off the cold by imbibing from his own supply and is in quite good spirits.
- **Merry** (LG halfling **commoner**) sells pastries, cookies, and cakes for 10 cp. Merry is passionate about baking and refers to her offerings as "positively scrummy!"
- **Hildegard** (N human **commoner**) sells beautiful knitwear (hats, scarves, gloves, and small knit animals) for 1 gp. She is actively knitting an ornate cowl when the characters approach.
- **Vela** (CG **human bard**) sells intricately-crafted wooden instruments; available at her table are a violin, viola, and lute, along with rarer instruments including a hurdy-gurdy and a balalaika. Each instrument costs 100 gp. Vela plucks at the balalaika to the same tune of the songs sung by the carolers.
- **Pavel** (N half-elf **commoner**) sells an array of fine stationary — notebooks, holiday cards, blank scrolls, quills, and monogram wax stamps. Each item costs 3 gp.

What Do They Know?

The merchants are glad to answer questions about the Sea Ward, the Midwinter Gala, and the upcoming performance at the Cassalanters. Because people have traveled to Waterdeep from across Faerûn, the merchants are equipped with *Volo's Waterdeep Enchiridion* (*W:DH*, pg. 163).

The merchants are especially excited about the upcoming performance at the Casslanter villa; they all speak highly of the visiting bard, Aria Cavatina (LG female protector aasimar **bard**), whose angelic voice is famous. They urge the characters to watch the performance.

Scene B. Join Us in Song

At 3 p.m., when the sun is beginning to lower in the sky, the doors of the Cassalanter Villa open. A servant of the household steps forward and heralds the start of the performance in the villa, by sounding off on a trumpet.

The crowd clusters in the **Entrance Hall** (see the Cassalanter Villa Map, Appendix 3) and the servant, **Willifort Crowelle** (LE **doppelganger** in the form of an aging male tiefling), leads them to the **Ballroom** on the second floor. The doors remain open to allow the overflow audience to trickle into the villa.

The villa, as always, is well fortified. Four **guards** flank the front door, two on each side of the interior. Inside the ballroom, six additional **guards** are posted around the perimeter of the room. The guards are private hires of the Cassalanters and are there to prevent guests from wandering around the estate. In addition to the private guards, the City Watch is on hand. Among the City Watch present is captain **Hyustus Staget** (LG male Illuskan human **veteran**) and two **guards** under his command.

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The Bard from Afar

Aria is beautiful and statuesque, with vivid red hair that contrasts her silvery-white skin. When she sings, her eyes glow a mesmerizing sapphire and shimmering wings sprout from her back. Aria is famous across Faerûn and hosting her is considered a great honor. She is a soprano.

Aria is warm and friendly. She comes from a long line of opera singers. In her possession is music for a song titled, Golden Wings, which has been damaged. She hopes to find someone who will help her restore it to its former glory. (See *Voice of an Angel*, Bonus Objective B, Appendix 5).

A temporary dais has been constructed next to the Cassalanters' beautiful harpsichord, which has been transported from the main hall to the ballroom. Ammalia and Victoro Cassalanter, dressed in opulent winter finery, smile warmly at the crowd. Their 8-year-old twin children, Terenzio and Elzerina, squirm in their freshly-starched holiday clothes. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notes that Elzerina looks anxious beyond just typical childlike ennui. She glances around the crowd, then over her shoulder, and nervously at her parents. Balled in her fist is a crumpled piece of paper (a story called *The Wooden Girl*, ripped from one of her books).

Ammalia introduces the performer, opera singer **Aria Cavatina** (LG female protector aasimar **bard**). Aria performs without accompaniment. She sings an opening song, elevating a familiar holiday tune; radiant light fills the room and enraptures the audience. Read or paraphrase the following.

> The singer's voice fills the room, and her radiant light follows. It is a soft, warm light that makes the Cassalanters' décor gleam and shimmer. Her voice is bright and clear, and you are riveted by it. The crowd watches in silence; even the ornery children have gone quiet and watch, open-mouthed.

Impish Tendencies

Aria extends her arms, heralding the start of another song, but suddenly stumbles and lets out a blood-curdling scream — any character that succeeds at a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check sees that a bright red imp has glommed onto the back of her neck. The imp attacks her with its sting attack and manages to do maximum damage (25 hps). Although Aria is hurt, she is more distressed from shock and surprise than from injury.

Allow the characters a chance to act; they should be given no more than 30 seconds of real time to decide, and no time for discussion, as there isn't time for strategy or planning.

- The imp is fixated on attacking Aria, largely because of the celestial aura she emits. If the characters attempt to communicate with it, it reacts with hostility toward them as well.
- If the characters choose to remain put, the City Watch guards manage to defeat the imp.
- The crowd panics, and Captain Staget steps forward. With a booming voice, he commands the City Watch and the private guards to shut down the festivities.

> Captain Staget shuts the front doors, locking everyone inside. "No one is allowed to leave until we can conduct an investigation!"

Captain Staget urges anyone willing to help with the investigation to step forward. (Meanwhile, one of his guards stabilizes Aria.) The inside crowd is comprised mostly of commoners, Waterdavian nobility and Cassalanter servants, and no one volunteers to help. Captain Staget turns to the characters and asks for their assistance.

A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check OR any character with at least a 12 passive Perception finds a piece of crumpled paper near the imp's body – it's a page torn from a children's book. If a character doesn't find it, Captain Staget does, and inquires if anyone knows what it is. The page contains a fable called *The Wooden Girl* (see Appendix 6 for the player handout).

Call to Action

The characters, willingly or not, are now tasked to find out why an imp has suddenly appeared in the Cassalanter villa. The sooner they can sleuth out the culprit, the sooner the festivities can resume.

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Episode 2: Where There's Smoke… (Main Objective A)

Estimated Duration: 90 minutes – 2 hours

Scene A: Lockdown in the Villa

Captain Staget permits the characters access to the Cassalanter Villa, but Ammalia and Victoro protest, requesting that the characters remain limited to the main compound — they claim they wouldn't want the characters to wander out of sight and get hurt. Staget reluctantly acquiesces to this request.

A successful DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check catches the worry masked behind the Cassalanter's otherwise warm demeanor; with the presence of a rogue imp in their home, they worry that this will cause suspicion and eventually lead to the discovery of their Asmodeus cult.

Smoke Signals

The culprit of the attack is Asmodeus, Lord of the Nine Hells, to whom the Cassalanters have pledged the souls of their young children. To spy on the Cassalanters, Asmodeus sent minions — several **imps** and a **spined devil** —to communicate with young Elzerina to gain access in their home. Elzerina is much more outgoing and ambitious than her shy brother, Terenzio, and makes for an easier target.

Asmodeus enjoys toying with clever potential votaries. He has tasked Elzerina with solving a puzzle using an old Faerûn fable, *The Wooden Girl*, which just happens to be an allegory about Asmodeus himself. He changed the name of the fable's protagonist from *Eliza to Elzerina* to catch her attention — and it worked. Reading the story aloud summoned an imp to Elzerina's room. Delighted, she befriended the small fiend, who convinced her to continue the puzzle so that more of his imp friends could join them. Elzerina agreed and completed another part of the puzzle, placing two toys in a pattern that matched two markings in Asmodeus's ancient sigil. When the second imp appeared, Elzerina saw the creatures' true fiendish tendencies and grew fearful. Her fears were realized when the second imp attacked Aria and shut down the party.

Elzerina is afraid to tell her parents what she has done but is willing to help the characters finish the puzzle so the devils plaguing her may be banished, and she can enjoy her favorite holiday festival.

Incidentally, the Cassalanter Villa is already home to several imps who serve Ammalia. These imps take the form of ravens and spiders, guarding secret rooms and spying on guests elsewhere on the grounds. However, Ammalia makes sure the imps never interact with her children (save for her eldest son, Osvaldo, an imprisoned **chain devil**) and they are never to appear in their native form. The creatures Elzerina has summoned are unrelated to these imps and serve a different master.

Ammalia draws her children to her. A DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check sees that Elzerina is especially frightened. When she sees someone holding the ripped story, she lets out a squeak before clamping her hands over her mouth.

To aid in the investigation, a recovering Aria offers the characters an item called the *Bell of Silent Carols* (see Appendix 10 for details).

A Puzzle with Two Paths

To be successful, the characters must establish the existence of the puzzle first, and then determine if they want to question the guests. Some of the guests help expedite the solution, but others will slow the proceedings down.

Ultimately, it's up to you to determine the pacing that works best for your party. It is also up to you to determine if other actions the characters perform might be helpful or not in solving this mystery. Avoid being too restrictive, but don't make it easy either.

The Sigil Puzzle

Asmodeus's puzzle is straightforward.

- On the back of the torn book page is a drawing of his ancient sigil, which is revealed if any character inspects the page. Since Asmodeus's name is on the sigil, the characters will likely figure out immediately that it represents him but may not know yet his level of involvement.
- A successful DC 13 Intelligence (History) OR (Arcana) check determines that the sigil represents Asmodeus and reveals that there are sigils representing other devils and demons.
- A successful DC 18 Intelligence (History) OR (Arcana) check reveals that sigils like this have traditionally been used as summoning circles to conjure devils and demons.
- This check also reveals that recreating the sigil using random objects activated a temporary one-way portal from the Nine Hells, allowing Asmodeus's minions to pass through to the Material Plane. In this context, the objects used to recreate the sigil are toys. Use the annotated guide in Appendix 7 to help facilitate the correct placement of the items.

There is a chance the characters wonder why they should even finish the puzzle if it will just bring more enemies to the villa. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (History) OR (Arcana) check confirms that since Elzerina has already activated the sigil, it needs to be expended fully before it can close. An NPC can also suggest this to the characters if there is doubt.

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Elzerina's Part

- Elzerina inadvertently activated the puzzle by reading *The Wooden Girl* aloud. This action summoned one imp named **Chernok**. Chernok is still in twins' room.
- On Chernok's urging, Elzerina placed seven marbles and two barrettes in a specific pattern on the circular rug in her room, activating part of the sigil. This summoned another **imp** named **Brimtoe**. Brimtoe escaped the room while Elzerina was in the ballroom and when he caught a glimpse of the celestial Aria Cavatina, he felt compelled to attack her.

The Character's Part

- The rest of the toys needed to recreate the sigil are in Elzerina's room in her toy chest.
- Placing at least two toys in the correct placement summons another **imp**.
- Placing at least four toys in the correct placement completes the sigil; however, the last part of the puzzle is dependent on location. Characters need to complete the sigil by assembling the toys in the correct pattern on an unmarked altar in the City of the Dead. (Episode 3 outlines the specific location in the City of the Dead.) Completing the puzzle in this location summons a **spined devil**, whom Asmodeus tasked to kidnap, or at least torment, Elzerina.
- Once the sigil has been activated and the **spined devil** is defeated, the characters can close the portal by pouring holy water on the altar.

How the Characters Figure This Out

- *The Wooden Girl* is the main source of clues. Asmodeus has highlighted parts of the story to help Elzerina. These highlighted pieces allude to what the puzzle entails.
- The characters can ask the other guests what they know about the story, the sigil, and the Cassalanter villa.
- If the characters get stuck, allow them to attempt a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) OR a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check to reveal another piece of information.

Scene B: More Questions Than Answers

Questioning the Guests

There are several attendees the characters can question if they so choose. Depending on who, the guest may help or hinder their efforts. If the characters run out of people to question, consult *Appendix B: Monsters and NPCs* in *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* (pg. 192) to infuse the adventure with more familiar faces.

Captain Staget insists on supervising the characters through this process, though they may choose where to stage the questioning.

Elzerina Cassalanter

*CG humanoid **commoner** (child)*

Behavior: Elzerina clearly exhibits signs of guilt and asks frequently for her brother.
What She Knows: A successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check is all it takes for Elzerina to spill the beans. If a character attempts to Intimidate Elzerina, Captain Staget will have them removed immediately from the questioning, forcibly if needs be.

When a successful check is made, Elzerina admits that she accidentally brought Chernok to her home, although she doesn't fully understand how. She says that *The Wooden Girl* was her favorite story and she saw her name in the text, and thought it was a present for her. In addition, she tells the characters about the imp's behavior, in her room.

"He was nice, at first! He let me clean his hat, which had a smudge on it. But then Chernok and his stinky friend Brimtoe started breaking things in my room and I got scared. Is Aria going to be alright?"

Terenzio Cassalanter

*CG humanoid **commoner** (child)*

Behavior: Elzerina's twin brother is excited by the activity in his home, but shy.
What He Knows: Terenzio knows nothing about what happened. If the characters succeed at a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check to earn Terenzio's trust. Attempting to Intimidate Terenzio meets with the same results as if they did the same to Elzerina. When a successful check is made, Terenzio says he heard Elzerina talking to someone the other night but didn't recognize the voice.

"I thought it might be Osvaldo visiting from school, but I don't think it was."

Victoro and Ammalia Cassalanter*

LE humans (see W:DH, pg. 193 & 218)

Behavior: Both Cassalanter adults are horrified by what has happened in their home, and this horror is earnest, if not as altruistic as it may seem. They ask eagerly after Aria's health, but maintain a calm, concerned demeanor. A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals the terror underneath the façade. They wish to not be questioned long, so they can take care of their children, who are frightened by the day's events.
What They Know: The Cassalanters are masters of deception and do everything in their power to hide their secret. However, they truly have no idea why a new imp suddenly appeared today, so in that surprise they are genuine.

*Combat with the Cassalanters is outside the scope of this adventure. However, if that's something your players choose to engage with, you'll need a copy of *Waterdeep Dragon Heist* handy.

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Esvele Rosznar, the Black Viper*

*CN human **black viper** (see W:DH, pg. 196)*

Behavior: The Black Viper has been lurking in the shadows and approaches the characters with her suspicion.

What She Knows: Esvele suggests that Asmodeus contacting the young Cassalanter was likely not an accident. She also says that *The Wooden Girl* is a fable many Waterdavian children read when they are little, and most know that the story is warning against Asmodeus. Beyond this information, Esvele has nothing more to offer.

*Combat with the Black Viper is outside the scope of this adventure. However, if that's something your players choose to engage with, you'll need a copy of *Waterdeep Dragon Heist* handy.

Floon Blagmar

*CG Illuskan human **commoner***

Behavior: Floon has enjoyed quite a few cups of delectable mulled wine. He is in a jovial mood and hasn't quite registered the danger.

What He Knows: Floon is rather simpleminded and has no idea what the attack meant or where the imp came from. He will speak about Aria with great reverence though.

"That bard has a lovely voice, doesn't she?"

Laiba "Nana" Rosse

*LE tiefling **cult fanatic***

Behavior: Nana is Elzerina and Terenzio's tutor. She puts on a stern face when questioned.

What She Knows: Nana tries to deflect suspicion away from the Cassalanters. She says that another partygoer likely brought the imps into the house to ruin the lovely festivities and bring shame upon the Cassalanters. She might even call attention to a specific guest (not a character), in order to divert attention. Nana claims she has never seen the book Elzerina was reading. She suspects it was a gift Elzerina opened early.

"Fables are just that — fables. Only silly children believe in fairytales."

Questioning the Staff

Should the characters want to question the Cassalanters' staff, the servants reiterate what Nana has stated.

- **Willifort Crowelle**, a **doppelganger** taking the form of an old tiefling butler;
- **Tissina Khyret** (LE tiefling **cult fanatic**), personal attendant to Ammalia;
- **Jandar Chergoba** (LE tiefling **cult fanatic**), head chef of Cassalanter Villa.

Exploring the Cassalanter Villa

The characters can find everything they need in Terenzio and Elzerina's room. However, they may choose to explore other areas they have been permitted to investigate. Additional descriptions of these rooms can be found in *W:DH*, pg. 118.

- ***Entrance Hall.*** There is nothing to see here, move along.
- ***Library.*** A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check turns up a blank *Enduring Spellbook* on one of the grand shelves.
- ***Reading Room.*** Victoro's journal sits on a side table; a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a scribbled note from Victoro: *"Neverember's dragons are an answer to our prayers."* The rest of the journal is fabricated drivel.
- ***Foyer.*** There is nothing to find in this room.
- ***Family Dining Room.*** There is nothing to find in this room.
- ***Kitchen.*** Tiefling servant Jandar Chergoba is in the kitchen, should the characters want to question him.

The Children's Room

The twin's bedroom contains two four-poster beds, once for each child. A life-sized stuffed unicorn stands in one corner.

- In the middle of the room is a circular area rug where Elzerina activated the sigil.
- Scattered on the rug are two hair **barrettes** and seven **marbles**; when the second imp appeared, Elzerina panicked and kicked the items out of the way, disrupting the sigil.
- The barrettes and the marbles can be put back in the correct placement, which counts as two of the four required items needed to progress the puzzle.

At the foot of each bed is a large, ornate toy chest. Terenzio's is a rich mahogany; Elzerina's is a shiny white with gold handles.

Terenzio's chest is filled with stuffed animals (wolf, fox, bear, and dragon); a train set; and a set of dice.

Elzerina's Toy Chest Contents

- A set of **pick-up sticks*** in a silk sleeve;
- A set of **metal jacks*** in a velvet pouch;
- An empty velvet pouch that stores **marbles*** (which are out on the floor);
- Two complete sets of wooden **alphabet blocks***;
- An articulating **wooden snake***;
- An ornately carved dreidel;
- A beautiful music box in the shape of an egg. Inside is a tiny ballerina that looks suspiciously like Elzerina. This item kicks off the bonus objective, Danse Macabre. See Appendix 5.
- Chernok the **imp**, poorly pretending to be a toy nutcracker. At first, he lays limp and glassy-eyed, but once the characters notice him, he waggles his tongue and salutes.

*Items marked with an asterisk are needed for the puzzle.

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Pipyap's Soldier

Chernok is the first imp Elzerina summoned. Chernok is bedecked in a soldier's uniform, complete with a soldier's hat, golden epaulettes, and a hole cut in the back of his tiny trousers to accommodate his tail. He is a clever little trickster and eager to socialize. Chernok happily helps the characters complete the puzzle; he wants his friends to join him on the Material Plane.

Although Chernok first and foremost serves Asmodeus, he is a soldier in Pipyap's Legion. Pipyap is an imp of some notoriety, though not part of this adventure.

Chernok is not hostile, but he is mischievous. He laments Brimtoe's foolish behavior but acknowledges that "shiny, radiant things" are very tempting for imps. Chernok enjoys his vacation out of the Nine Hells and will do what he can to prolong his stay.

Pipyap (also spelled *Pypyap*) was the imp familiar of Halvin Graingle, a member of the Cult of the Dragon. Longtime D&D fans may recognize both Pipyap and Halvin's names. Pipyap has moved on to gain a level of notoriety unheard of for a typical imp.

If the characters are struggling with the puzzle, Chernok gives them hints to expedite the solution; however, Asmodeus has forbidden him from revealing the solution outright. Chernok also tells the characters that the final part of the puzzle requires them to place the puzzle pieces in the unmarked altar in the City of the Dead. He tells them to "look for the girl with the wings," alluding to the statue that marks the altar.

If the characters continue to assemble the sigil puzzle in the children's room, each placement of two toys in the correct spot summons another **imp**. The imps quickly unite in their desire to destroy everything in sight; Chernok urges his comrades to be patient and well-behaved, although he too eventually partakes in causing chaos.

Suggested names for additional imps: Teufel, Steve, Dimitri, Rimpkin, Gertrude, Lucrezia.

Playing the Pillars

Combat

Because of the nature of the adventure, characters don't have much to fight – yet. However, depending on where the characters find themselves in the Cassalanter Villa, there are many secrets and strange creatures to encounter. If the characters are hungry to fight, you can toss a few extra imps their way.

Exploration

The Cassalanter villa is huge and holds many secrets. The City Watch does not allow characters to venture far, although characters can attempt to sneak into the rest of the villa to uncover more information about the Cassalanters. This is a very risky choice, for there are many guards roaming the property, and being caught earns them the scorn and distrust of the Cassalanters.

Social

Questioning the guests gives the characters a chance to meet Waterdavians they may have not yet encountered. The questioning does not have to be treated like an interrogation; the partygoers are eager to see this issue put to rest and are generally amenable to being questioned if it will help the process.

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Episode 3: Silent Night, Devil's Light (Main Objective B)

Estimated Duration: 30 minutes

Objective

Characters can complete the sigil on the unmarked altar and summon Asmodeus's minion, solving the puzzle and closing the summoning circle. Captain Staget allows the characters to leave the villa and requests they return afterward to confirm that the issue has been resolved.

Prerequisites

Characters must have either encountered Chernok or sleuthed from *The Wooden Girl* that they need to complete the puzzle in the City of the Dead.

Area Information

It is evening by the time the characters venture across Waterdeep to the City of the Dead. The Midwinter Gala continues throughout the night, although many of the revelers stay clear of the Cassalanter Villa.

Snow has begun to fall, blanketing the city. The City of the Dead is eerily quiet. The characters see their breath form puffs in the frigid air.

Dimensions & Terrain. The City of the Dead covers a large area, and characters may be tempted to explore much of it. Depending on the pacing of the adventure, you may choose to let them do this, or place the unmarked altar in a visible place and lower the DC to find it. This is also a good place for characters to use the *Bell of Silent Carols*.

Lighting. The cemetery is lit by streetlamps that are placed sporadically throughout the area. The lighting is considered **dim**. Some of the larger mausoleums have sconces for torches.

Encounters in the City of the Dead

Waterdavians treat the City of the Dead like a public park and outdoor museum and enjoy spending time there in the warmer seasons. Despite its purpose as a cemetery, it is not the spooky, haunted locale that visitors may assume. However, in the winter, it is too cold for sensible folk to spend much time outside, and the City of the Dead is empty.

The absence of people has drawn some lurking creatures. If you have plenty of time to continue the adventure, feel free to roll on the random encounter table below. Characters may encounter some of them; not all the creatures are hostile.

Random Encounters in the City of the Dead

d4	Creature
1	Ice mephit (2)
2	Dire wolf
3	Giant owl
4	Reindeer x 3 (uses **deer** stats)

The Unmarked Altar

There is a strange stone sculpture in the City of the Dead. Waterdavians are used to unusual statues and have not questioned the appearance of this one. The characters spot the statue by making a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check OR having a passive Perception of 14+. Additionally, speaking the name "Asmodeus" aloud while in the City of the Dead causes the statue to glow, guiding them to it, and lowers the required check to DC 10.

The statue depicts a little girl with wings; she holds a candelabra with nine candles. At first glance, the child appears celestial, but a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that the wings are spindly and webbed, like a bat's wing. When the characters come within 10 feet of the statue, the candles begin to glow a vivid, angry orange.

Embedded in the ground in front of the statue is a circular stone slab, about two feet in diameter. There are no markings on the slab.

Placing a minimum of four toys on the slab in the correct placement fully activates the whole sigil; it appears in bright orange and summons a **spined devil** (see *Adjusting the Scene*; the creature may be a bearded devil if the party's APL is Strong or higher). The spined devil is named Koluchki, and he addresses the characters, looking around for Elzerina. Koluchki quickly becomes impatient and turns hostile, attacking the characters.

Adjusting the Scene

Here are some suggestions for adjusting this scene, according to your group.

- **Very Weak:** The **spined devil** is no longer resistant to magical weapons and has 19 hp.
- **Weak:** The **spined devil** is no longer resistant to magical weapons.
- **Strong:** Replace the **spined devil** with a **bearded devil**.
- **Very Strong:** Replace the **spined devil** with a **bearded devil** and add two **vargouilles**.

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Deactivating the Sigil

Once Koluchki has been dispatched, the sigil continues to glow; if left undisturbed, it will continue to summon a **spined devil** once every hour.

The sigil can be deactivated by dousing it with holy water. This fact is revealed if a character makes a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check OR a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check. Using holy water ensures that the stone slab can never be used again in conjunction with a summoning sigil. The ripped page with *The Wooden Girl* disintegrates.

Resolution

The characters may return to the villa. When they arrive, the imps have vanished, and another local bard plays jovial tunes on the harpsicord. The Cassalanters and Captain Staget thank the characters for their help. Captain Staget makes *boots of the winterlands* available for those inclined to spend their Treasure Checkpoints on them.

Aria is now healed, and she takes her place once again on the dais. Her beautiful voice fills the chamber, engulfing the audience in a pleasant light that warms without burning.

Adventure Rewards

Upon completing the adventure, the characters each receive rewards based upon their accomplishments. These rewards include advancement and treasure, and may include special rewards, such as story awards or new downtime activities, as follows:

Advancement Checkpoints

The characters receive one advancement checkpoint for each objective completed:

- ***Story Objective A:*** Solving Asmodeus's toy puzzle.
- ***Story Objective B:*** Defeating Asmodeus's minion and deactivating the sigil.

The characters earn an additional advancement checkpoint for each **bonus objective** they complete:

- ***Bonus Objective A:*** Completing Aria Cavatina's ruined song.
- ***Bonus Objective B:*** Removing the curse on one of Elzerina's toys.

AARON HÜBRICH

Treasure Checkpoints

The characters receive a treasure checkpoint for completing **both main objectives** (maximum 2).

Magic Item Unlock

Characters completing the adventure's **main objectives** unlock these magic items.

Bell of Silent Carols. This item can be found in *Appendix 10*.

Boots of the Winterlands. This item can be found in *Appendix 10*.

Story Awards

Assuming respectful and appropriate conduct, the characters have earned Respect of the City Watch, which allows them each one check at Advantage on one check to avoid penalty when caught committing a crime that doesn't involve murder, theft, or assault. If anyone attempted to intimidate one or both of the Cassalanter children or otherwise conducted themselves in a manner that would be considered disrespectful, they gain Scorn of the City Watch, with gives that character Disadvantage on their next check to avoid punishment from the City Watch.

DM Rewards

In exchange for running this adventure, you earn advancement and treasure checkpoints and downtime as though you played the adventure, but none of the other rewards listed above.

However, this adventure may qualify for rewards earned by completing DM Quests. See the ALDMG (*Adventurers League Dungeon Master's Guide*) for more information about DM Quests.

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Appendix A: NPCs

Elzerina Cassalanter

(EL-zuhr-ee-nah CASS-ah-lan-tur).

Elzerina is an eight-year-old girl with some elvish blood, thanks to her father's half-elf lineage. Asmodeus has temporarily set his sights on her to get to her parents, and she feels very guilty for letting imps into her home.

Personality: I'm bubbly and outgoing, and I enjoy meeting new strangers.

Ideal: All I want to do is explore the city but our parents don't let us out very much.

Bond: I adore my brother, Terenzio, even if he is a lot quieter than I am.

Flaw: Sometimes I act without thinking.

Aria Cavatina

(Ah-REE-ah Cah-vah-TEEN-ah).

Aria is a protector aasimar bard. She is beautiful and kind and emits a radiant aura wherever she goes. She is an opera singer (soprano).

Personality: I am warm, friendly, and forgiving.

Ideal: Music is the universal language that unites people from all backgrounds.

Bond: I want to make my family proud and uphold the Cavatina name.

Flaw: Although I am nice to everyone, I only form close relationships with other celestials.

Ammalia and Victoro Cassalanter

(Ah-MAH-lee-ah, Vick-TORE-oh).

The Cassalanter parents appear to be outwardly charitable, but they are involved in a much larger plot to pay off Asmodeus and regain control over their childrens' souls.

Personality: We maintain a warm, if somewhat distant, demeanor. We are gracious hosts to those in our home.

Ideal: We want the best of everything: the safety of our children, the wealth and respect from Waterdavians, and a mutually-beneficial relationship with Asmodeus.

Bond: We love our children but have made a selfish pledge to Asmodeus.

Flaw: Our lust for wealth and power has condemned our family, but we will do whatever it takes to maintain our standing.

Hyustus Staget

(High-US-tuss STAG-ett).

Hyustus Staget is the captain of the City Watch (veteran). He is gruff but reasonable.

Personality: I am quite curt and humorless.

Ideal: I do whatever it takes to uphold the Code Legal.

Bond: I am sworn to keep Waterdeep safe.

Flaw: Because of my job, I am used to seeing the worst in people.

Ammalia and Victoro Cassalanter

Appendix B: Creature Statistics

Bard

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)
Hit Points 44 (8d8 + 8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Wis +3
Skills Acrobatics +4, Perception +5, Performance +6
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages any two languages
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spellcasting. The bard is a 4th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *friends, mage hand, vicious mockery*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person, healing word, heroism, sleep, thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility, shatter*

Song of Rest. The bard can perform a song while taking a short rest. Any ally who hears the song regains an extra 1d6 hit points if it spends any Hit Dice to regain hit points at the end of that rest. The bard can confer this benefit on itself as well.

Taunt (2/Day). The bard can use a bonus action on its turn to target one creature within 30 feet of it. If the target can hear the bard, the target must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma saving throw or have disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws until the start of the bard's next turn.

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Commoner

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 4 (1d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Actions

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

Cult Fanatic

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-good alignment

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)
Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Persuasion +4, Religion +2
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Dark Devotion. The fanatic has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Spellcasting. The fanatic is a 4th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 11, +3 to hit with spell attacks). The fanatic has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips: *light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *command, inflict wounds, shield of faith*
2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, spiritual weapon*

Actions

Multiattack. The fanatic makes two melee attacks.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

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Doppelganger

Medium monstrosity (shapechanger), neutral

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +6, Insight +3
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Shapechanger. The doppelganger can use its action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid it has seen, or back into its true form. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Ambusher. The doppelganger has advantage on attack rolls against any creature it has surprised.

Surprise Attack. If the doppelganger surprises a creature and hits it with an attack during the first round of combat, the target takes an extra 10 (3d6) damage from the attack.

Actions

Multiattack. The doppelganger makes two melee attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Read Thoughts. The doppelganger magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 feet of it. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 feet of wood or dirt, 2 feet of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. While the target is in range, the doppelganger can continue reading its thoughts, as long as the doppelganger's concentration isn't broken (as if concentrating on a spell). While reading the target's mind, the doppelganger has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.

Guard

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 16 (chain shirt, shield)
Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +2
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Actions

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Veteran

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 17 (splint)
Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +2
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. The veteran makes two longsword attacks. If it has a shortsword drawn, it can also make a shortsword attack.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) piercing damage.

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Imp

Tiny fiend (devil, shapechanger), lawful evil

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 10 (3d4 + 3)
Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (–2)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Insight +3, Persuasion +4, Stealth +5
Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Infernal, Common
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Shapechanger. The imp can use its action to polymorph into a beast form that resembles a rat (speed 20 ft.), a raven (20 ft., fly 60 ft.), or a spider (20 ft., climb 20 ft.), or back into its true form. Its statistics are the same in each form, except for the speed changes noted. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede the imp's darkvision.

Magic Resistance. The imp has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Sting (Bite in Beast Form). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must make on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Invisibility. The imp magically turns invisible until it attacks or until its concentration ends (as if concentrating on a spell). Any equipment the imp wears or carries is invisible with it.

Spined Devil

Small fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 22 (5d6 + 5)
Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Infernal, Telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede the devil's darkvision.

Flyby. The devil doesn't provoke an opportunity attack when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

Limited Spines. The devil has twelve tail spines. Used spines regrow by the time the devil finishes a long rest.

Magic Resistance. The devil has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. The devil makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its fork or two with its tail spines.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (2d4) slashing damage.

Fork. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

Tail Spine. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 20/80 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

SLAWOMIR MANLAK, MICHAEL BERUBE

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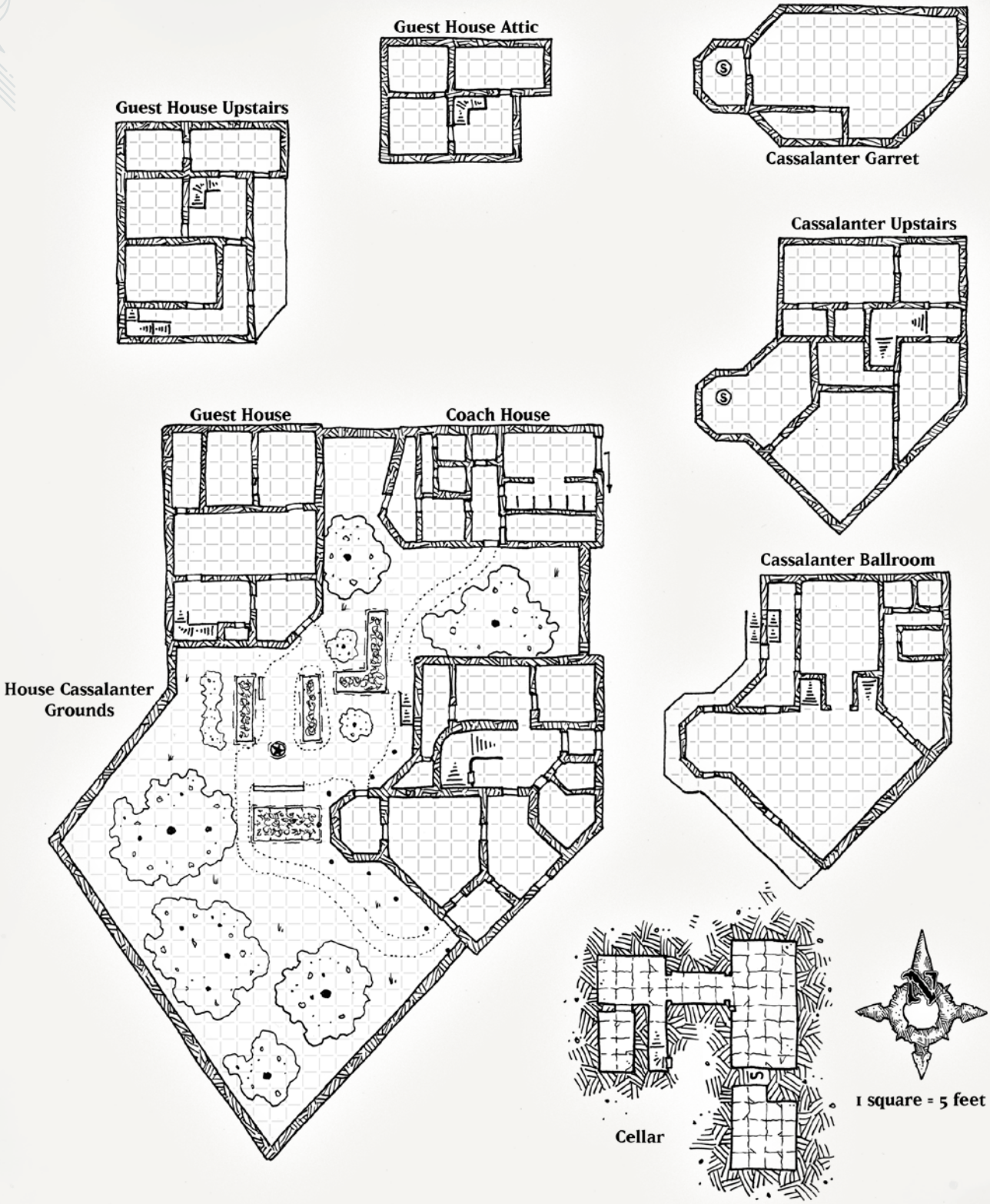
Appendix C: Map of the Cassalanter Villa



DYSON LOGOS

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Appendix 4: Voice of an Angel (Bonus Objective A)

Estimated Duration: 30 minutes

Song of the Seraphim

Visiting performer Aria Cavatina enlists the characters' help in completing an ancient musical arrangement.

Aria is from a long line of aasimar bards, whose celestial blood is said to come from Milil. A scroll of an ancient song called *Golden Wings* has been passed down from generation to generation in the Cavatina family. Aria's family lore claims that the song has magical properties — when sung or read, the song summons a celestial creature to the aid of the bard who performs it. Unfortunately, part of the scroll was burned when Aria's great-grandmother, Elea, faced off against a dragon many years ago. Aria hopes to compose a new end to the song and restore its power.

Golden Wings

Like a candle, I burn
In the glow of your radiance
Like a plucked string, I learn
The bright hum of your resonance

Like a pilgrim, I bow
Humbled by your divinity
Will you come to me now?
I send you my prayer, my plea

Lifted voice, lowered eyes
Prostrated here on hands and knees...

Completing the Song

- ***Reward creativity at the table.*** Players can come up with two new lines of lyrics that fit both the rhyming meter and the theme of the song. See Appendix 9 for the annotated version of the song. The song is comprised of three four-line stanzas that alternate in meter. If the characters come up with appropriate lyrics, they may attempt a DC 13 Charisma (Performance) check with Advantage to confirm that the addition is a good fit.
- ***Prompt ability checks.*** The characters must succeed at two separate checks without aid: a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check results in crafting appropriate lyrics, and a successful DC 15 Charisma (Performance) check results in the correct meter. Both successes ensure the song is successfully completed. If the characters succeed at one part but fail at the other, Aria offers her assistance and the characters roll with advantage.

When the song is successfully completed, Aria sings it and the act summons a celestial gold pseudodragon. Aria gives the characters a heartfelt thanks, and awards characters with a copy of the song so that it may never be lost again (see *Appendix 10*).

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Appendix 5: Danse Macabre (Bonus Objective B)

Estimated Duration: 30 minutes

The characters discover a strange toy in Elzerina's toy box that has a strange effect on Elzerina and can destroy it or remove the curse. It bears a maker's mark that reads *BLINSKY*.

Prerequisites

Characters must have discovered Elzerina's toy chest to kick off this objective. Alternately, you may choose to have Elzerina and Terenzio play with this toy early in the adventure.

Elzerina Ballerina

Among Elzerina Cassalanter's many toys, there is an ornate round music box in the shape of an egg, about 10 inches long. The outside is a deep ruby red encrusted with small gems. Opening the egg reveals a tiny ballerina. Turning the key that juts out from the back of the egg makes the ballerina twirl slowly to the mournful melody that emits from the box.

Strangely, the tiny ballerina looks exactly like Elzerina, with blonde pigtails and wide hazel eyes. The ballerina is dressed in a white leotard, similar to Elzerina's Midwinter Gala white dress.

When the key is turned, Elzerina herself twirls until the song ends. She has no control over her body when this happens, and this occurs regardless of how far she is from the item. Her parents assume she is just being her usual self, but this compulsion to dance distresses her greatly. If Elzerina is around the characters when they discover the toy, she panics and asks them to take it from the house.

Blinsky's Bane

Gadof Blinksy is a famous toymaker who resides in a place far away from Waterdeep... Barovia. Characters who make a successful DC 20 Intelligence (History) check OR a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check, recognize Blinsky's name and recall his reputation for making exquisite, albeit sinister, toys. How did the Cassalanters come by such an item? Tendrils of darkness from across the realms seem to be reaching out for young Elzerina.

If Elzerina is absent when they discover it, they may suspect the item is cursed if they have attempted a *detect magic* spell while in the children's room.

- A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check spots the name *BLINKSY* carved into the flat underside of the music box.
- An additional successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices that the ballerina looks startlingly like Elzerina.
- A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check determines that the item is cursed with an enchantment that causes the subject to dance whenever the box is wound. Ultimately, if someone continues to wind the key, Elzerina would be forced to continue dancing until she dies from exhaustion.
- A successful DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) determines that the curse can be broken by severing the link between the ballerina and the subject. Altering the ballerina's appearance, such as changing her hair color, would work. The ballerina is not a poppet, so altering it will not alter (or injure) Elzerina. Technically, destroying it also works if the ballerina's appearance is altered by the effort (such as a limb breaking off).

Once the curse is broken, characters can choose to leave the toy or take it. They may ask Elzerina what she wants them to do with it, and she is eager for them to take it far away. If the Cassalanter adults are approached about the toy, they say it was a gift from an acquaintance in Damara and don't know much about it. It is worth a hefty sum of gold, however.

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Appendix 6: The Wooden Girl (Player Handout #1)

The Wooden Girl

From The Faerûn Child's Book of Fables

The girl's name was Eliza and she was brought to life in the puppet-maker's workshop. Like most girls, Eliza was equipped with limbs and a face and, of course, a heart. The puppet maker, Sophie, crafted Eliza with loving detail. Sophie perched Eliza in the window of the shop, where she could wave to the passers-by and enjoy the view of the ocean in the distance.

On the first morning of Midwinter, Eliza gazed longingly through the window, watching the white caps fold over the sea. Snow began to fall, dotting the shop windows and obscuring her vision. Eliza grew sad and wistful. She wanted to leave the shop, but knew that she could not.

Suddenly the snowdrops on the glass began to melt. A vivid orange glow filled Eliza's sight. On the other side of the window stood an old man, face shrouded in a torn scarf, holding a candle. **Elzerina** was fearful, for Sophie had always told her: *wooden girls must stay away from fire*. Sophie told Elzerina about the **wooden snake** she had crafted as a child. When the snake was brought to life, it slithered toward the hearth, seeking warmth. A stray ember ignited the snake, and it withered to ashes. This was not the only warning; Sophie also told Elzerina about the set of **pick-up sticks** she had crafted when she was the woodworker's apprentice. Pleased with her work, Sophie rubbed two sticks together to sand away the splinters — but the friction sparked, and the sticks burnt to cinders.

But the man's flame was low on the wick, and he peered at her through the glass. *Little wooden girl, why are you so sad?*

I wish to see the sea beyond this pane of glass, she said. When it snows, the drops blur the window, and I feel trapped.

What if I took you from your mount? he said. Would you like that?

Elzerina frowned. *My maker warned me not to go outside, for I could get lost. She says little girls like me get lost in big cities.*

But the man persisted. *Surely she did not create you just to keep you trapped here forever. What if you fetched her a gift for the holiday?*

This filled Elzerina with joy. *Oh, yes! I should so love to bring my maker a present. And perhaps I will get a quick glimpse of the sea.*

He stepped into the shop and lifted her from her mount. He marched through the city and she reveled in the freedom. But he strode not to the sea, but toward the **City of the Dead.**

It was not the coovl blue ocean she eventually saw before her, but a scene awash in gray. Perhaps if she blurred her sight, she could pretend that the feeble sun glinting off of the snow-slick tombstones was the white-capped surface of the sea. But Elzerina knew already that she had made a terrible mistake. She suddenly longed for the puppet-maker's workshop, for the stoic company of **alphabet blocks** and sets of dice and intricately-carved spinning tops and tiny ballerinas who danced but never spoke. The man wove through the rows of stones and sat at **a circle embedded in the ground, an altar unmarked and unnamed**. But it had been desecrated already; Elzerina saw the remnants of a fire that once burned, the debris of used tinder.

The man pulled away his scarf and grinned at her, an evil smile matched by red eyes that glinted with sadistic pleasure. He placed her atop the ashes and pulled a matchbook from his shabby coat pocket. He had the tool but not the fuel — until he had found the wooden girl in the workshop window, made from the choicest wood for burning, the perfect size for kindle on a long winter night.

The man struck an oiled match tip and the flame roared to life, a curious gradient of deep navy and violent orange. And as the blue heart of the flame engulfed her, Eliza thought of both the azure sea she would never meet and the puppet-maker's kind cornflower eyes, and longed for their cool, **dousing touch.**

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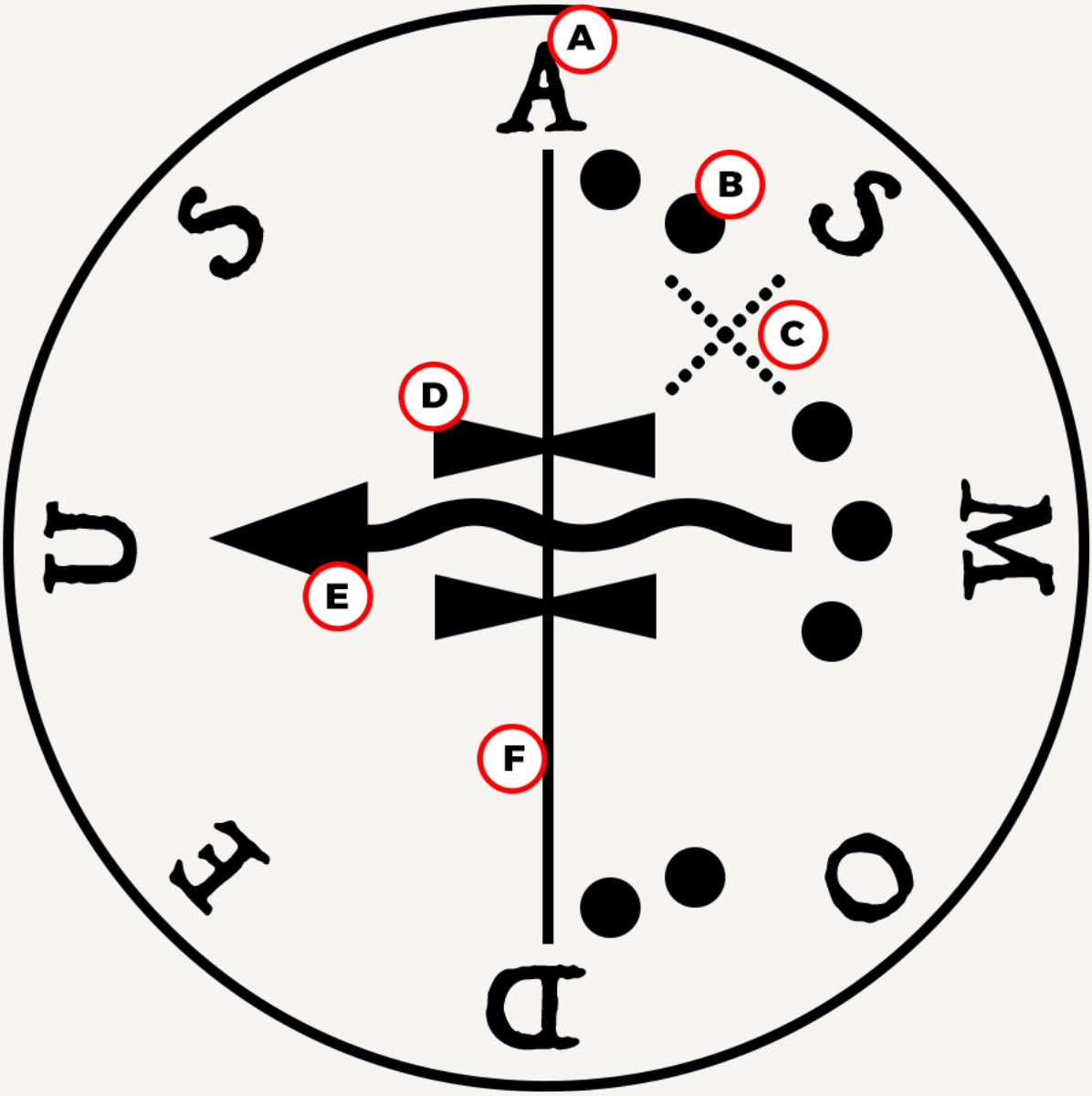
Appendix 7: Sigil of Asmodeus (Annotated Version for DMs)

Asmodeus's sigil can be replicated with the following toys in Elzerina's toy chest. A minimum of four out of the six items, placed in the proper area, is needed to summon Asmodeus's spined devil.

A: Each letter in Asmodeus's name is marked with a **wooden alphabet block**.
B: Each of the seven circles is marked with a **glass marble**.
C: The crisscross is marked with a **metal jacks**.
D: Each triangular shape is marked with a **barrette**.
E: The squiggly shape is marked by a **wooden snake**.
F. The straight line is marked by a **pick-up stick**.



ASHLEY WARREN

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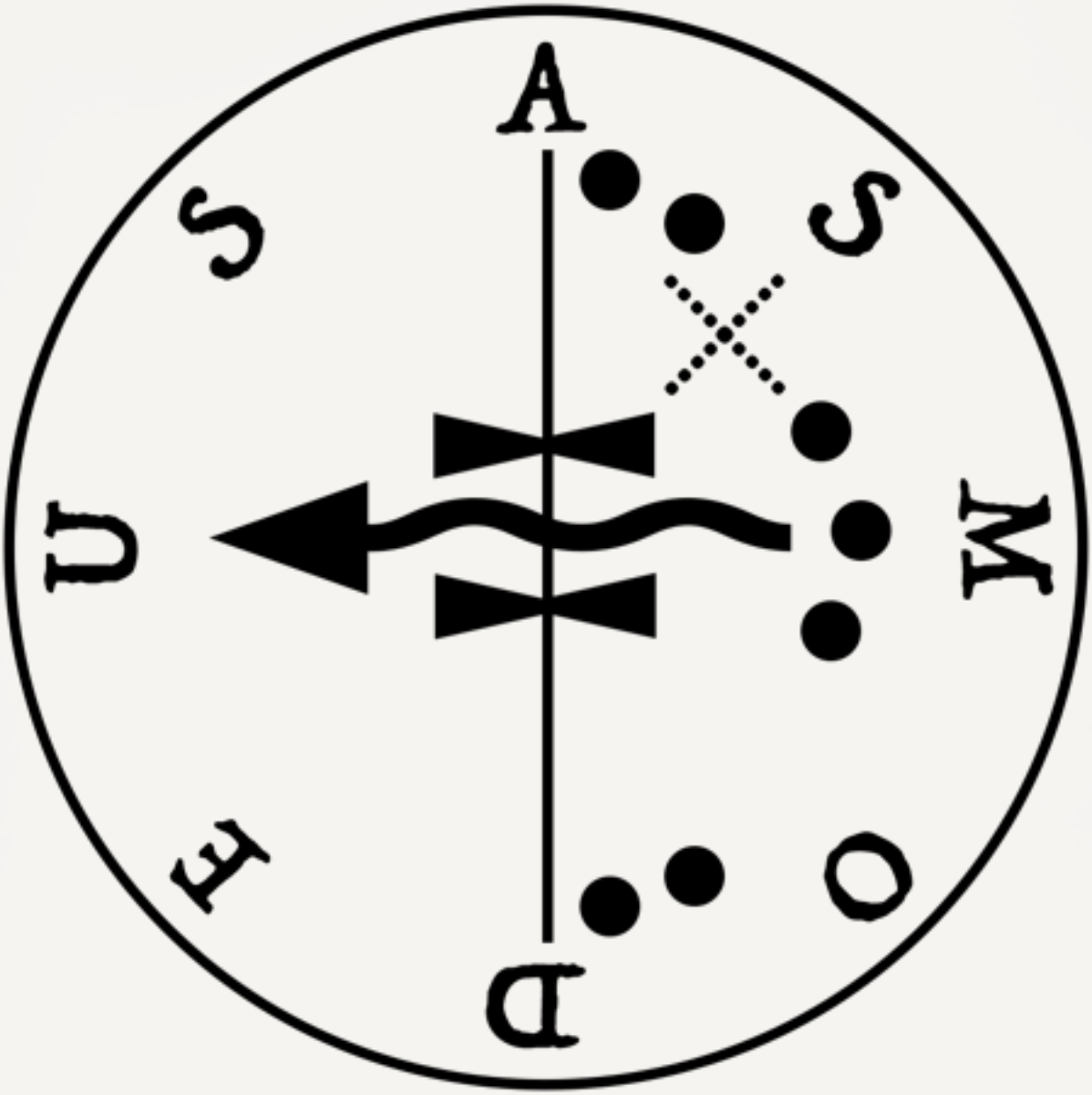
Appendix 8: Sigil of Asmodeus
(Player Handout #2)



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Appendix 9: Golden Wings
(Annotated—Player Handout #3)

Golden Wings
Songwriter Unknown

A *Like a candle, I burn* (6 syllables)

B *In the glow of your radiance* (8 syllables)

A *Like a plucked string, I learn* (6 syllables)

B *The bright hum of your resonance* (8 syllables)

C *Like a pilgrim, I bow* (6 syllables)

D *Humbled by your divinity* (8 syllables)

C *Will you come to me now?* (6 syllables)

D *I send you my prayer, my plea* (8 syllables)

E *Lifted voice, lowered eyes* (6 syllables)

D *Prostrated here on hands and knees* (8 syllables)

E _____ (missing line) (6 syllables)

D _____ (missing line) (8 syllables)

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Appendix 10: Magic Items

Characters completing this adventure's objectives unlock these magic items.

Bell of Silent Carols (Horn of Silent Alarm)

Wondrous Item, common

This bell has 4 charges. When you use an action to shake it, one creature of your choice can hear the bell's ring in the tune of festive carols, provided the creature is within 600 feet of the bell and not deafened. No other creature hears sound coming from the bell. The bell regains 1d4 expended charges daily at dawn.

Boots of the Winterlands

Wondrous Item, uncommon (requires attunement)

These furred boots are snug and feel quite warm. While you wear them, you gain the following benefits:

- You have resistance to cold damage.
- You ignore difficult terrain created by ice or snow.
- You can tolerate temperatures as low as -50 degrees Fahrenheit without any additional protection. If you wear heavy clothes, you can tolerate temperatures as low as -100 degrees Fahrenheit.

A Gift of Golden Wings

Song

Singing or reciting the lyrics to *Golden Wings* takes one minute. If a good-aligned character casts *find familiar* after making a successful DC 15 Charisma (Performance) check, they may summon a celestial gold pseudodragon to serve as their familiar. This creature is lawful good and abandons the character if they ever willingly harm a celestial.

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Appendix 11: Dungeon Master Tips

This adventure is designed for **three to seven 1st-4th level characters** and is optimized for **five characters with an average party level (APL) of 3.** Characters outside this level range cannot participate in this adventure.

To DM an adventure as a D&D Adventurers League sanctioned game, you **must** have 3 to 7 players—each with their own character whose level is within the adventure's level range.

Preparing the Adventure

Before you start play, consider the following:

- Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you'd like to highlight or remind yourself of while running the adventure, such as a way you'd like to portray an NPC or a tactic you'd like to use in a combat. Familiar yourself with the adventure's appendices and handouts.
- Gather any resources you'd like to use to aid you in running this adventure--such as notecards, a DM screen, miniatures, and battlemaps.
- Ask the players to provide you with relevant character information, such as name, race, class, and level; passive Wisdom (Perception), and anything specified as notable by the adventure (such as backgrounds, traits, flaws, etc.)

Players can play an adventure they previously played as a Player or Dungeon Master, but may only play it once with a given character. Ensure each player has their character's adventure logsheet (if not, get one from the organizer). The players fill out the adventure name, session number, date, and your name and DCI number. In addition, the player also fills in the starting values for advancement and treasure checkpoints, downtime days, and renown. These values are updated at the conclusion of the session.

Each player is responsible for maintaining an accurate logsheet. If you have time, you can do a quick scan of a player's character sheet to ensure that nothing looks out of order. If you see magic items of very high rarities or strange arrays of ability scores, you can ask players to provide documentation for the irregularities. If they cannot, feel free to restrict item use or ask them to use a standard ability score array.

Point players to the D&D Adventurers League Players Guide for reference. If players wish to spend downtime days and it's the beginning of an adventure or episode, they can declare their activity and spend the days now, or they can do so at the end of the adventure or episode. Players should select their characters' spells and other daily options prior to the start of the adventure, unless the adventure specifies otherwise. Feel free to reread the adventure description to help give players hints about what they might face.

Adjusting this Adventure

When combat is a possibility, the adventure will provide a sidebar that helps you to determine the best mix/number of opponents to provide them with to create an appropriate challenge. While you're not bound to these adjustments; they're here for your convenience and consideration.

To determine whether you should consider adjusting the adventure, add up the total levels of all the characters and divide the result by the number of characters (rounding .5 or greater up; .4 or less down). This is the group's average party level (APL). To approximate the **party strength** for the adventure, consult the table below.

Determining Party Strength

Party Composition	Strength
3-4 characters, APL less than	Very weak
3-4 characters, APL equivalent	Weak
3-4 characters, APL greater than	Average
5 characters, APL less than	Weak
5 characters, APL equivalent	Average
5 characters, APL greater than	Strong
6-7 characters, APL less than	Average
6-7 characters, APL equivalent	Strong
6-7 characters, APL greater than	Very strong

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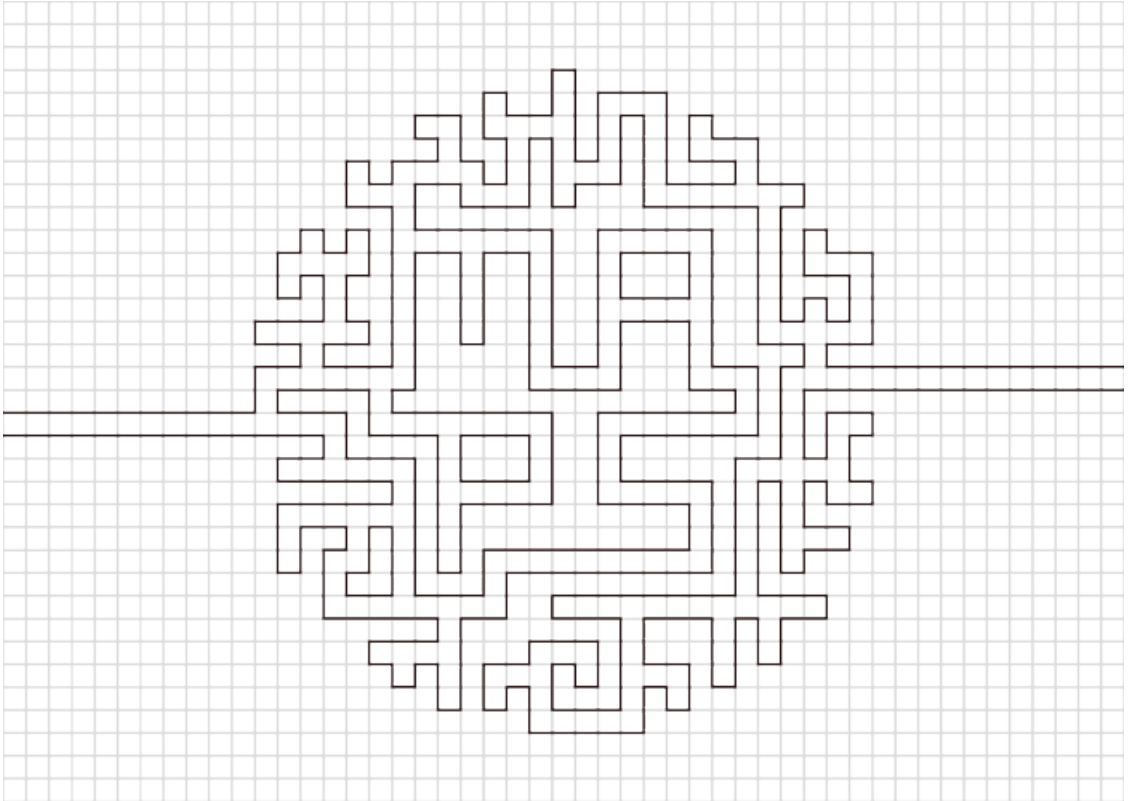


Maps of the Month

This issue we feature crashed ships, sailing vessels, and peek down into the most massive dungeon of them all!

As part of our look at helping beginners to play D&D this issue, we wanted to include a number of maps that have been used to teach the game through the years. Whenever possible, we also look to provide you with both tagged and untagged versions of these maps!

Extra Life

As part of this year's Extra Life adventure we're thrilled to include original maps from cartographer and illustrator Claudio Pozas.

We interviewed Pozas back in *Dragon+ 13* (our ambitious "Endeavor Issue" which individually covered each adventure featured in *Tales from the Yawning Portal*). He spoke about illustrating the famed three weapons— *Whelm*, *Wave*, and

Blackrazor—as well as recreating the wondrous map leading to White Plume Mountain.

For this year's D&D Extra Life adventure Claudio created maps for both the Monastery of the Distressed Body as well as Daoine Gloine, the city under ooze. In addition to interpreting the adventure details, Claudio worked wonders to instill his own creativity into the maps. For example, his vision for the monastery read: "The conning tower and the engine furnace are the main elements of the ship that are exposed. Most of the vessel got encased in molten rock when the ship crashed, and that rock solidified around the hard edges of the machinery. The monks that have taken over since have established a 'quarry' of sorts, mining the outer rock until they reach the metal plates underneath, and used those plates to build the auxiliary buildings of the monastery, sometimes reaching enough into the ship to access a useable room, such as the medbay-turned-torture chamber."

In addition, Pozas styled the hole punched through the ship (where areas nine and ten float) to give a glimpse of the inner workings of an area that was seared shut by the impact of the ship's crash. Wirings and tubes can still be seen jutting out at the bottom…

(Select to view)

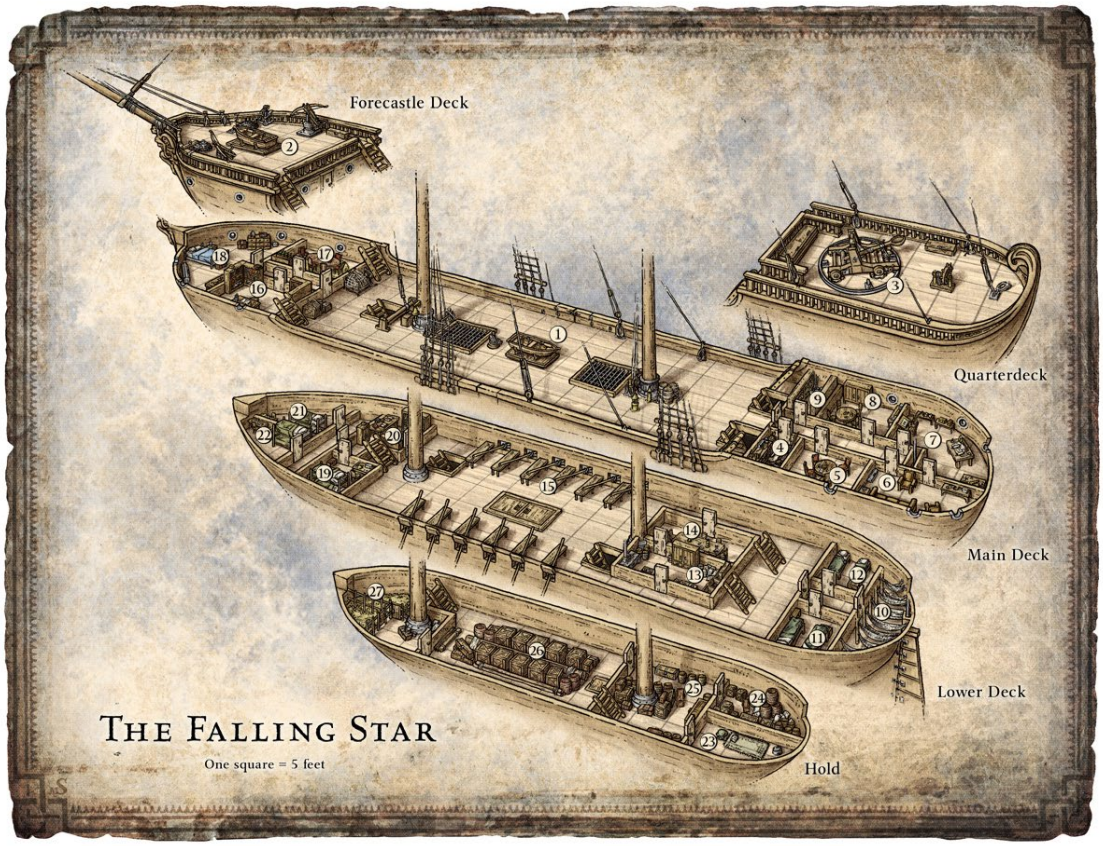
LINK TO HIGH-RES

All said, a thrilling map for use in the game! And over in our cartoon section we are equally pleased to showcase Daoine Gloine, the city under ooze!

The Falling Star

It's all about the ships (which are, in a way, both falling stars as well)! Back in *Dragon+ 14* we collected a set of maps from *Stormwrack* and *Storm King's Thunder*, and earlier this issue we toured *The Falling Star*, the amazing ship offered by WizKids (look for it in action as part of the livestream from the folks at UpUpDownDown).

The ship's concept originated with Chris Perkins, designed for his home campaigns back when he was 19. As an added bonus, we're pleased to offer its interior map from cartographer Mike Schley:



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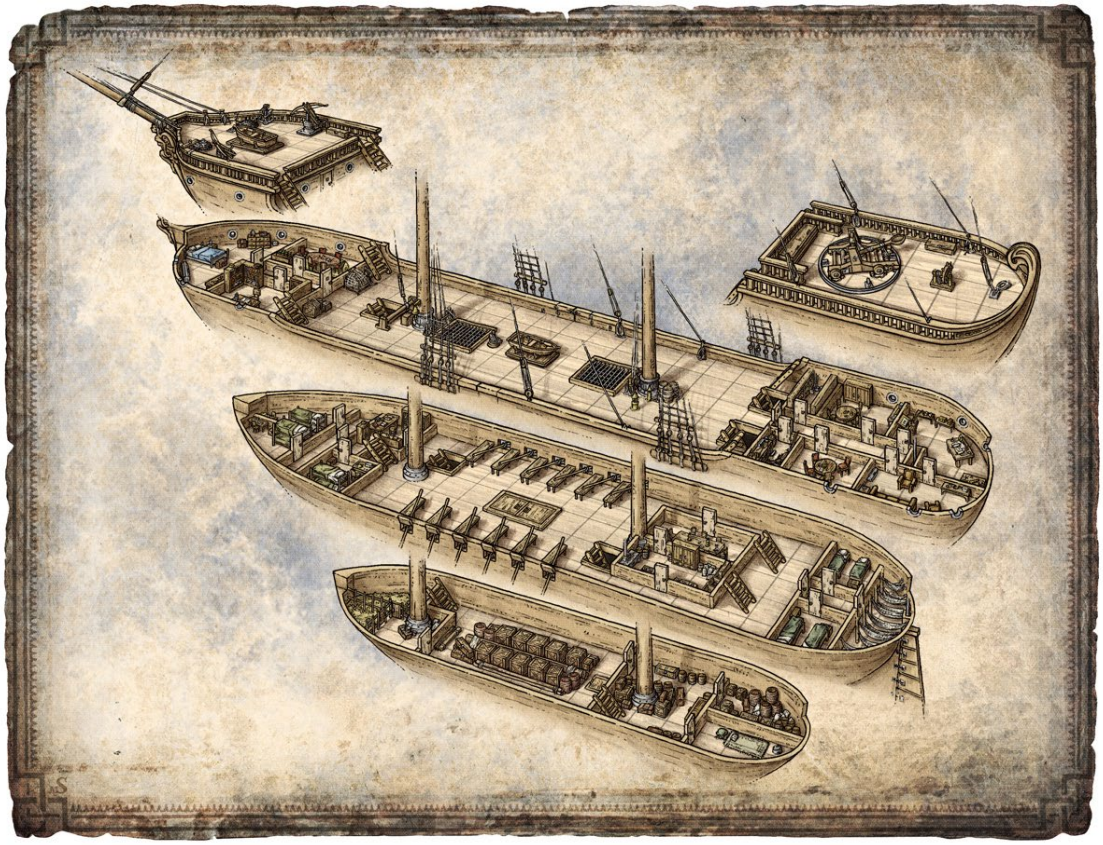

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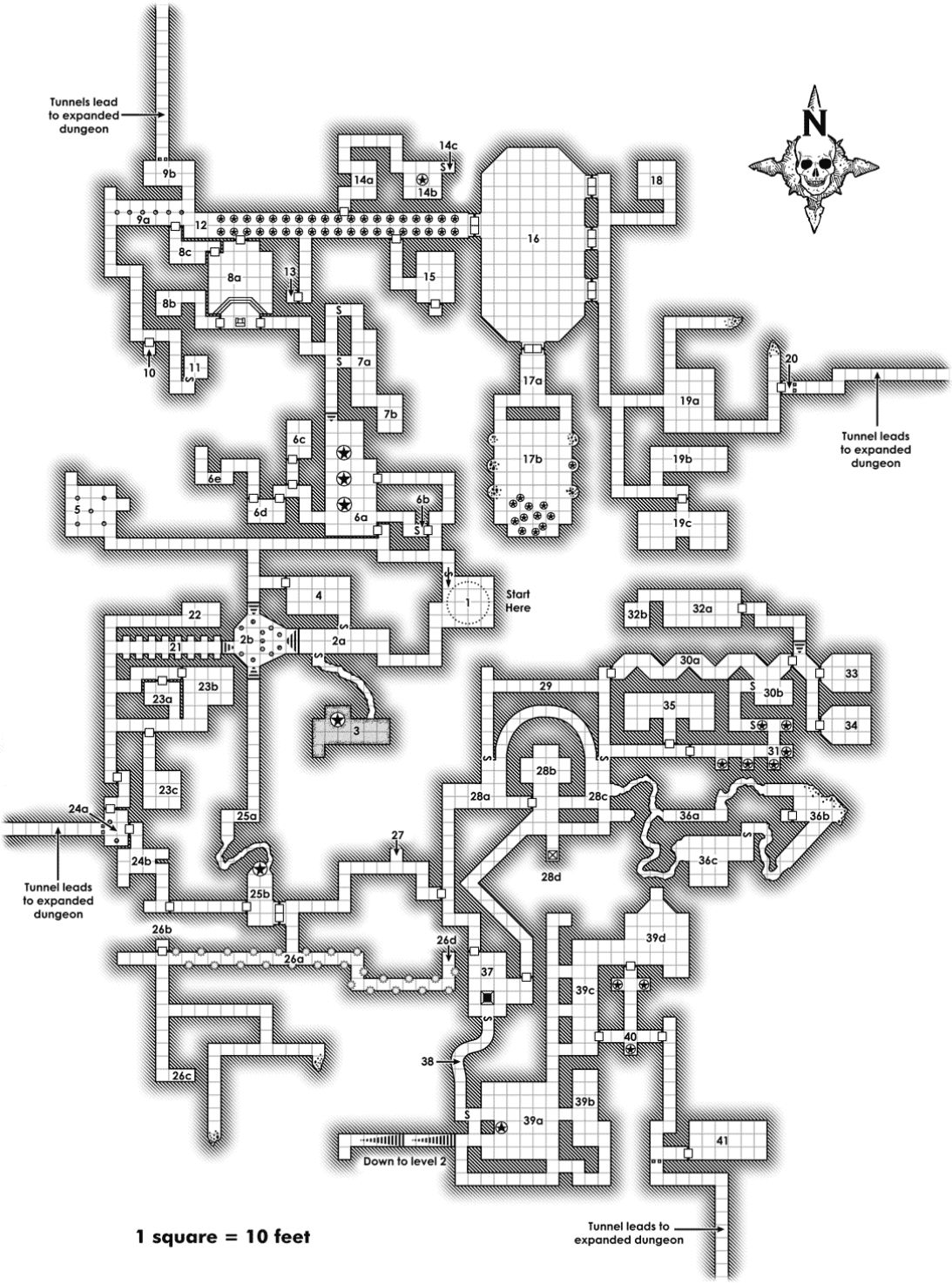
Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage

DMs and players enjoying the crime-based hijinks of *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* will have noticed something a little bit retro about the product: those amazing black and white maps. Harking back to the style of iconic maps of the past, their inspiration came from a drive for artistic expression and a desire to help modern day DMs.



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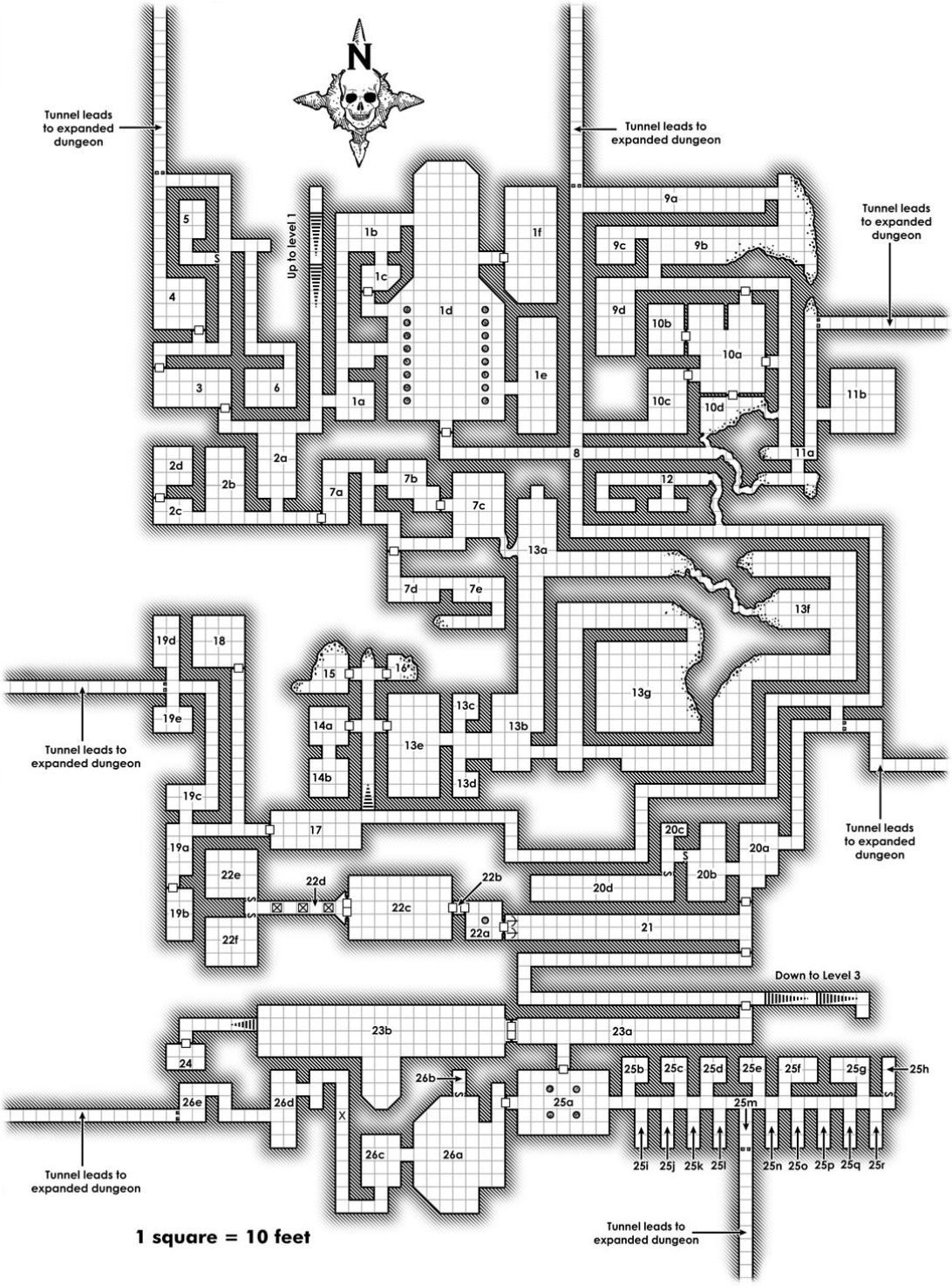

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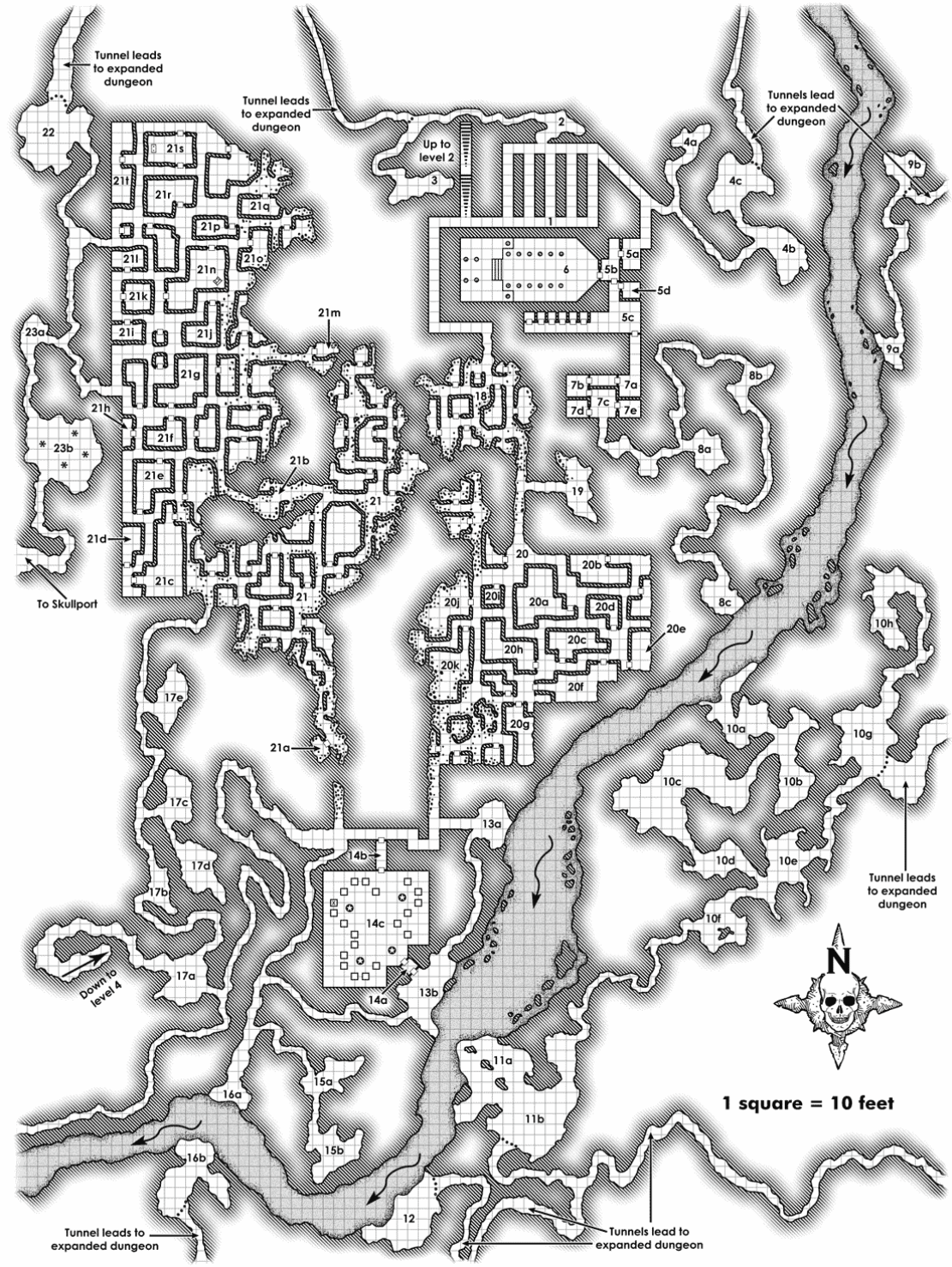

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"There were two reasons behind the creation of black and white maps," explains Senior Producer Chris Perkins, who leads the team of designers, developers, and editors who produce D&D RPG products. "First, to move to a more utilitarian style so the maps were

easier for DMs to replicate—say on a battle map if they wanted to—because sometimes the artistic nature of the map can actually get in the way of that utilitarian purpose.

"The second reason is that we wanted to take a little bit of a chance to see how they would contrast with the rest of the art, to differentiate them from the full color images in the book. Visually it creates a cognitive break and you realize you're looking at something other than a normal piece of art."

Once the team had decided on this option for their maps the only question was who would produce them? Perkins wanted artists who could give the maps a hand-drawn quality, as opposed to having them look computer generated. Dyson Logos was chosen for *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*, while Tim Hartin was commissioned for *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*.

"We were fishing around for artists we thought would conjure up a little bit of retro but more importantly artists whose style felt organic because they made their maps by hand. For me, the subtle imperfections that come from drawing by hand actually add something to these maps," Perkins tells *Dragon+*.

Having a single artist create all of the maps in the two *Waterdeep* adventures gave them consistency but it also set its own challenges. Logos and Hartin needed to start work early to match their art to the written material and bring both elements together.

"By creating the maps early we could hand those sketches off to the writers and they could work from them. Then if they wanted to make certain refinements—such as adding a door over here or moving a passage or getting rid of an extra room—Dyson or Tim could make that change when they took the maps to final. It was one of the most collaborative map-making processes we've ever had."

Moving from color to black and white also saw the team get creative about the way their maps were constructed. On a color map, it can be obvious that a green section is supposed to be trees and a brown section is rocks. On a black and white map, markings and codes replace those subtleties.

"We tried to keep the maps quite spare so as not to create too much

visual clutter, which meant we didn't put in things like furnishings. In those cases we had to make sure that the accompanying text was clear about where items were in that space," says Perkins.

"But D&D has a long history of black and white maps, and over the years we've learned to trust certain icons to carry their weight. Looking at the maps there are a couple of places where there is clearly water flowing through an area and the use of line work on the water was enough to make that obvious."

Perkins says the reaction from players and DMs has been positive on the whole:

"Almost universally people seem very happy with the stylistic change. Some people have viewed it as a step backwards, but we feel the experiment is worth it and we will definitely do it again," he says.

"People like the maps for the reasons we thought they'd like them: they're very approachable and easy to read; they convey the necessary amount of information without going overboard; and they do help to create a visual break throughout the product.

"Every project has to be considered holistically to gauge what's right for it and we may try yet another map style in a future project. But we're committed to doing it for *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*—those two adventures are peas in a pod."

Waterdeep: Dragon Heist and Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage are available to buy now.

Cartographers
As always our appreciation goes out to our amazing cartographers; this issue, these include Claudio Pozas, Mike Schley, Dyson Logosand Tim Hartin.

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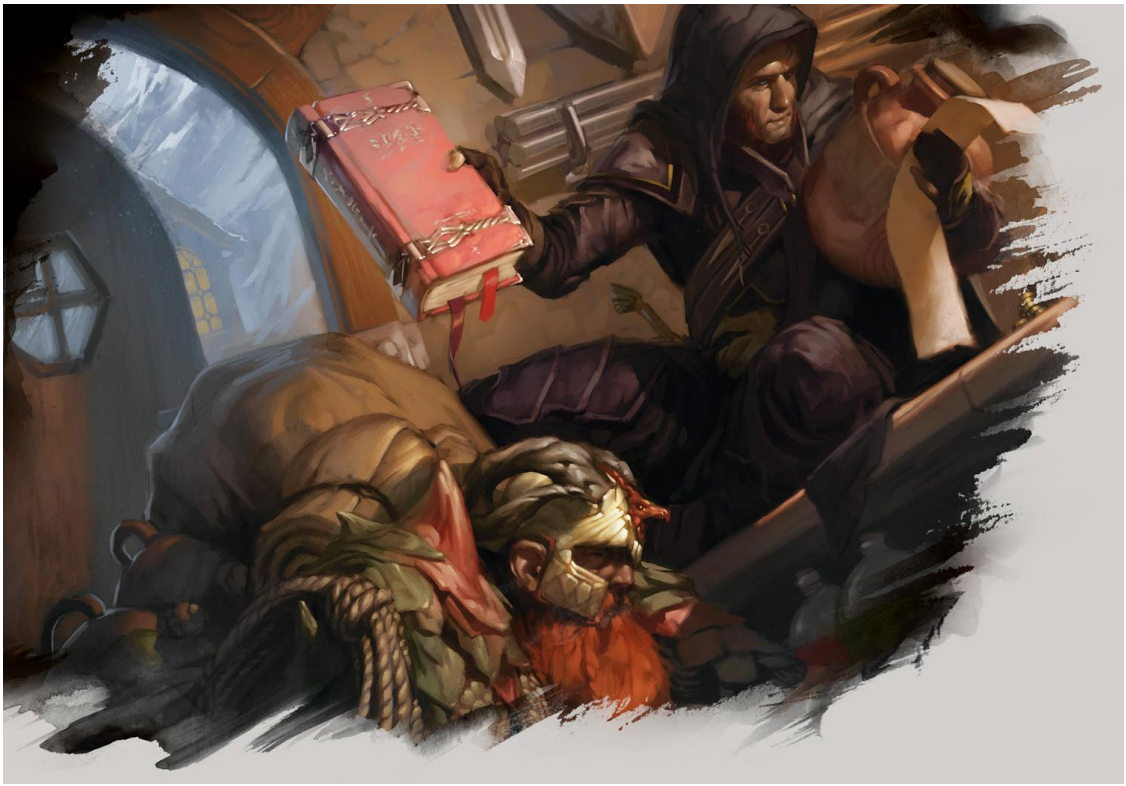
Unearthed Arcana: Of Ships and the Sea

It’s nautical but nice this month as we discuss ships, officers, crew, and the hazards of the high seas.

Wizards RPG Staff/Designers



Playtest Material
The material here is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your campaign but not refined by final game development and editing. They aren’t officially part of the game and aren’t permitted in D&D Adventurers League events.
If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.

This issue Unearthed Arcana presents a huge playtest resource for swashbucklers looking to brave the waves. The oceans offer both risk and reward for those in search of adventure and while taking to the seas might seem like a simple enterprise there are a huge number of variables to consider.

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These optional rules include stat blocks for different kinds of vessels (including an airship), the knowledge players and DMs need to manage a ship's officers and crew, and the perils of this kind of travel —yes, there's a section on "Crashing", as well as a Hazard Check Results table. And a poorly led or mistreated crew might also turn against its officers. Mutiny, we hear you cry!

Access the full rules for nautical adventures by downloading the PDF.

DOWNLOAD PDF

A survey on these options will appear on the D&D website. Please try them out and let us know what you think.

To see the full treasure trove of Unearthed Arcana articles, covering new classes and feats, conversions of rules from previous editions, and much more, visit the archive.

Have a request for Unearthed Arcana? Follow @mikemearls on Twitter and let him know.

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UNEARTHED ARCANA

Of Ships and the Sea

This document provides optional rules for using ships in play, managing the officers and crew needed to run a ship, and owning a ship. The sea offers rewards and risks for those willing to brave the waves in search of adventure.

This Is Playtest Content

The material here is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your D&D campaign but not refined by final design and editing. They aren't officially part of the game and aren't permitted in D&D Adventurers League events.

If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.

Ship Stat Blocks

A ship's stat block gives game details for use when a ship is involved in combat or other situations where its defensive and offensive capabilities are relevant. The stat block has three main parts: basic statistics, action options, and the ship's components.

Ships can't take any actions on their own. Without any effort from its crew, a ship might drift on the water, come to a stop, or careen out of control.

Basic Statistics

Size

Most ships are Large, Huge, or Gargantuan. A ship's size category is determined by its length or width, whichever is longer. For instance, a ship that is 10 feet long and 20 feet wide would use the size category that has a 20-foot width, which means the ship is Gargantuan.

Space

A ship doesn't have a square space unless its stat block specifies otherwise. For example, a ship that is 20 feet long and 10 feet wide occupies a 20-by-10-foot space.

A ship can't move into a space that is too small to accommodate it. If it tries to do so, it crashes, as described later in the "Crashing" section.

Capacity

A ship's stat block indicates how many creatures and how much cargo it can carry. Creatures include both the crew required to operate the vessel and any passengers who might ride along. Passengers could include marines who repel boarders and lead the attack on monsters and enemy ships.

Travel Pace

A ship's travel pace determines how far the vessel can move per hour and per day. A ship's movement-related components (described later in the stat block) determine how far the vessel can move each round.

Ability Scores

A ship has the six ability scores (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma) and corresponding modifiers.

A ship's Strength represents its size and weight. Dexterity represents a ship's ease of handling. A ship's Constitution covers its durability and the quality of its construction. Ships usually have a score of 0 in Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma.

If a ship has a 0 in a score, it automatically fails any ability check or saving throw that uses that score.

Vulnerabilities, Resistances, and Immunities

A ship's vulnerabilities, resistances, and immunities apply to all its components, unless otherwise noted in the stat block.

Typical Ship Immunities

If you're creating your own ship, they're usually immune to poison and psychic damage. Ones crafted from metal or stone are also typically immune to necrotic damage. They are also usually immune to the following conditions: blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, and unconscious.

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Components

A ship is composed of different components:

Hull. A ship's hull is its basic frame, on which the other components are mounted.
Control. A control component is used to steer a ship.
Movement. A movement component is the element of the ship that enables it to move, such as a set of sails or oars.
Weapon. A ship capable of being used in combat has one or more weapon components, each of which is operated separately.

A ship's component might have special rules, as described in the stat block.

Armor Class

A component has an Armor Class. Its AC is meant to reflect its size, the materials used to construct it, and any defensive plating or armor used to augment its toughness.

Hit Points

A ship component is destroyed and becomes unusable when it drops to 0 hit points. A ship is wrecked if its hull is destroyed.

A ship component does not have Hit Dice.

Damage Threshold

If a ship component has a damage threshold, that threshold appears after its hit points. A component has immunity to all damage unless it takes an amount of damage equal to or greater than its damage threshold, in which case it takes damage as normal. Any damage that fails to meet or exceed the damage threshold is considered superficial and doesn't reduce the component's hit points.

Actions

This part of the stat block specifies what the ship can do on its turn, using its special actions rather than the actions used by creatures. It even relies on its actions to move; it doesn't have a move otherwise.

Sample Stat Blocks

Here are examples of ship stat blocks.

Airship

Gargantuan vehicle (80 ft. by 20 ft.)

Creature Capacity 20 crew, 10 passengers
Cargo Capacity 1 ton
Travel Pace 9 miles per hour (216 miles per day)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	0	0	0

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Hull

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 300

Control: Helm

Armor Class 16
Hit Points 50
Move up to the speed of its elemental engine, with one 90-degree turn. If the helm is destroyed, the airship can't turn.

Movement: Elemental Engine

Armor Class 18
Hit Points 100; –20 ft. speed per 25 damage taken
Locomotion (air) elemental power, speed 80 ft. If the engine is destroyed, the ship immediately crashes.

Weapons: Ballistas (4)

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 50 each
Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, range 120/480 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) piercing damage.

Actions

On its turn, the airship can use its helm to move using its elemental engine. It can also fire its ballistas. If it has half its crew or fewer, it can fire only two of the ballistas.

Galley

Gargantuan vehicle (130 ft. by 20 ft.)

Creature Capacity 80 crew, 40 passengers
Cargo Capacity 150 tons
Travel Pace 4 miles per hour (96 miles per day)

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STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	4 (−3)	20 (+5)	0	0	0

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Hull

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 500 (damage threshold 20)

Control: Helm

Armor Class 16
Hit Points 50
Move up to the speed of one of its movement components, with one 90-degree turn. If the helm is destroyed, the galley can't turn.

Movement: Sails

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 100; –10 ft. speed per 25 damage taken
Locomotion (water) sails, speed 35 ft.; 15 ft. while sailing into the wind; 50 ft. while sailing with the wind

Movement: Oars

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 100; –5 ft. speed per 25 damage taken
Locomotion (water) oars, speed 30 ft.

Weapons: Ballistas (4)

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 50 each
Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, range 120/480 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) piercing damage.

Weapons: Mangonels (2)

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 100 each
Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 200/800 ft. (can't hit targets within 60 ft. of it), one target. *Hit:* 27 (5d10) bludgeoning damage.

Weapon: Ram

Armor Class 20
Hit Points 100 (damage threshold 10)
The galley has advantage on all saving throws relating to crashing when it crashes into a creature or object, and any damage it suffers from the crash is instead applied to the ram. These benefits do not apply if a vehicle crashes into the galley.

Actions

On its turn, the galley can move using its helm. It can also fire its ballistas and its mangonels. If it has half its crew or fewer, it moves at half speed and can fire only half of its weapons.

Keelboat

Gargantuan vehicle (60 ft. by 20 ft.)

Creature Capacity 3 crew, 4 passengers
Cargo Capacity 0.5 tons
Travel Pace 3 miles per hour (72 miles per day)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	7 (−2)	13 (+1)	0	0	0

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Hull

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 100 (damage threshold 10)

Control: Helm

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 50
Move up to the speed of one of its movement components, with one 90-degree turn. If the helm is destroyed, the keelboat can't turn.

Movement: Sails

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 100; –5 ft. speed per 20 damage taken
Locomotion (water) sails, speed 25 ft.; 15 ft. while sailing into the wind; 35 ft. while sailing with the wind

Movement: Oars

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 100; –5 ft. speed per 25 damage taken
Locomotion (water) oars, speed 20 ft.

Weapon: Ballista

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 50
Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, range 120/480 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) piercing damage.
Keelboats typically include a ballista only when they are equipped for combat.

Actions

On its turn, the keelboat can move using its helm. It can also fire its ballista if it is equipped with one. If it has half

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its crew or fewer, it moves at half speed and can't use its ballista.

Longship

Gargantuan vehicle (70 ft. by 20 ft.)

Creature Capacity 40 crew, 100 passengers
Cargo Capacity 10 tons
Travel Pace 5 miles per hour (120 miles per day)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	6 (−2)	17 (+3)	0	0	0

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Hull

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 300 (damage threshold 15)

Control: Helm

Armor Class 16
Hit Points 50
Move up to the speed of one of its movement components, with one 90-degree turn. If the helm is destroyed, the longship can't turn.

Movement: Sails

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 100; –10 ft. speed per 25 damage taken
Locomotion (water) sails, speed 45 ft.; 15 ft. while sailing into the wind; 60 ft. while sailing with the wind

Movement: Oars

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 100; –5 ft. speed per 25 damage taken
Locomotion (water) oars, speed 20 ft.

Actions

On its turn, the longship can move using its helm. If the longship loses half or more of its crew, it moves at half speed.

Rowboat

Large vehicle (10 ft. by 5 ft.)

Creature Capacity 2 crew, 2 passengers
Cargo Capacity 0.25 tons
Travel Pace 3 miles per hour (24 miles per day)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	8 (−1)	11 (+0)	0	0	0

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, stunned, unconscious

Hull

Armor Class 11
Hit Points 50

Control and Movement: Oars

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 25
Locomotion (water) oars, speed 15 ft.
Move up to its speed, with one 90-degree turn. Without oars, the rowboat's speed is 0.

Actions

On its turn, the rowboat can move using its oars.

Sailing Ship

Gargantuan vehicle (80 ft. by 20 ft.)

Creature Capacity 30 crew, 20 passengers
Cargo Capacity 100 tons
Travel Pace 5 miles per hour (120 miles per day)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	7 (−2)	17 (+3)	0	0	0

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Hull

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 300 (damage threshold 15)

Control: Helm

Armor Class 18
Hit Points 50
Move up to the speed of its sails, with one 90-degree turn. If the helm is destroyed, the ship can't turn.

Movement: Sails

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 100; –5 ft. speed per 25 damage taken
Locomotion (water) sails, speed 45 ft.; 15 ft. while sailing into the wind; 60 ft. while sailing with the wind

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Weapon: Ballista

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 50
Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, range 120/480 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) piercing damage.

Weapon: Mangonel

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 100
Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 200/800 ft. (can't hit targets within 60 ft. of it), one target. *Hit:* 27 (5d10) bludgeoning damage.

Actions

On its turn, the sailing ship can move using its helm. It can also fire its ballista and its mangonel. If it has half its crew or fewer, it moves at half speed and can fire either its ballista or its mangonel.

Warship

Gargantuan vehicle (100 ft. by 20 ft.)

Creature Capacity 40 crew, 60 passengers
Cargo Capacity 200 tons
Travel Pace 4 miles per hour (96 miles per day)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	4 (−3)	20 (+5)	0	0	0

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Hull

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 500 (damage threshold 20)

Control: Helm

Armor Class 18
Hit Points 50
Move up to the speed of one of its movement components, with one 90-degree turn. If the helm is destroyed, the warship can't turn.

Movement: Sails

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 100; –10 ft. speed per 25 damage taken
Locomotion (water) sails, speed 35 ft.; 15 ft. while sailing into the wind; 50 ft. while sailing with the wind

Movement: Oars

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 100; –5 ft. speed per 25 damage taken
Locomotion (water) oars, speed 20 ft. with 80 or more rowers, 10 feet with 40 or more rowers, 5 ft. with 20 or more rowers

Weapons: Ballistas (2)

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 50 each
Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, range 120/480 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) piercing damage.

Weapons: Mangonels (2)

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 100 each
Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 200/800 ft. (can't hit targets within 60 ft. of it), one target. *Hit:* 27 (5d10) bludgeoning damage.

Ram

Armor Class 20
Hit Points 100 (threshold 10)
The warship has advantage on all saving throws relating to crashing when it crashes into a creature or object. Any damage it suffers from the crash is instead applied to the ram. These benefits do not apply if another vessel crashes into the warship.

Actions

On its turn, the warship can move using its helm. It can also fire its ballistas and mangonels. If it has half its crew or fewer, it moves at half speed and can fire only half of its weapons.

Officers

If you'd like to explore running a ship, it needs officers to oversee its operations—officers who fill six different roles. A person can fill only one role at a time, though multiple people can be assigned to a single role. Some roles aboard a ship reflect the need for trained experts to direct a crew's efforts. Others focus on keeping the crew's health and morale in order.

Each role is described below, along with the abilities and proficiencies that help a character excel at it (but that aren't required):

Captain. The captain issues orders. The best captains have high Intelligence and Charisma scores, as well as proficiency with water vehicles and the Intimidation and Persuasion skills.

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First Mate. This specialist keeps the crew's morale up by providing close supervision, encouragement, and discipline. A first mate benefits from a high Charisma score, as well as proficiency with the Intimidation and Persuasion skills.

Bosun. The bosun (or boatswain) provides technical advice to the captain and crew and leads repair and maintenance efforts. A good bosun has a high Strength score, as well as proficiency with carpenter's tools and the Athletics skill.

Quartermaster. The quartermaster plots the ship's course, relying on knowledge of nautical charts and a study of weather and sea conditions. A reliable quartermaster tends to have a high Wisdom score, as well as proficiency with navigator's tools and the Nature skill.

Surgeon. The ship's surgeon tends to injuries, keeps illnesses from spreading throughout the ship, and oversees sanitation. A capable surgeon benefits from a high Intelligence score, as well as proficiency with herbalism kits and the Medicine skill.

Cook. A ship's cook works with the limited ingredients aboard a ship to make meals. A skilled cook keeps the crew's morale in top shape, while a poor one drags down the entire crew's performance. A talented cook has a high Constitution score, as well as proficiency with brewer's supplies and cook's utensils.

Crew

A ship requires a number of able-bodied sailors to crew it, as specified in its stat block. A crew's skill, experience, morale, and health are defined by its quality score. A crew starts with a quality score of +4, and that score varies over time, going as low as –10 and as high as +10. It decreases as a crew takes casualties, suffers hardship, or endures poor health. It increases if the crew enjoys high morale, has good health care, and receives clear, fair leadership.

A typical crew member uses the commoner stat block in the *Monster Manual*.

Loyalty and Quality

When dealing with an individual member of the crew, you might find it useful to use the optional loyalty rule from chapter 4 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. To convert a quality score to an individual's loyalty score, add 10 to the crew's quality score.

Mutiny

A poorly led or mistreated crew might turn against its officers. Once per day, if a crew's quality score is lower than 0, the captain must make a Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check modified by the crew's quality score.

If the check total is between 1 and 9, the crew's quality score decreases by 1.

If the check total is 0 or lower, the crew mutinies. They become hostile to the officers and might attempt to kill them, imprison them, or throw them overboard. The crew can be cowed into obedience through violence, combat, or offers of treasure and other rewards.

When the DM ends the mutiny, the crew's quality score increases by 1d4.

Shore Leave

Life aboard a ship is a constant wear on the crew. Spending time in port allows the crew to relax and regain its composure.

If a crew's quality score is 3 or lower, the score increases by 1 for each day the crew spends in port or ashore.

Travel at Sea

Here are rules to help adjudicate travel at sea, specifically travel of an hour or more. This material builds on the travel rules in the *Player's Handbook* and the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Travel Pace

Ships travel at a speed given their stat blocks. Unlike with land travel, players can't choose to move at a faster pace, though they can choose to go slower.

If a ship's mode of movement takes damage, it might be slowed. For every decrease of 10 feet in speed, reduce the ship's pace by 1 mile per hour and 24 miles per day.

Activity While Traveling

The activities available to a ship's crew and passengers are a bit different from the options available to a group traveling by land. Refer to "Activity While Traveling" in chapter 8 of the *Player's Handbook* for more information on some of the topics discussed below.

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A number of activities are restricted to certain officers, unless the DM rules otherwise. For example, a bard might be allowed to engage in the raise morale activity by playing bawdy songs on deck to lift the crew's spirits.

The party's pace has no effect on the activities they can engage in while traveling by ship.

Draw a Map

A ship's captain often undertakes this activity, producing a map that records the ship's progress and helps the crew get back on course if they get lost. No ability check is required.

Forage

The character casts out fishing lines, keeping an eye out for sources of food, making a Wisdom (Survival) check when the DM calls for it.

Raise Morale (First Mate Only)

The first mate can manage the crew's time to grant extended breaks, provide instruction, and improve morale. Once per day, if the crew's quality score is 3 or lower, the first mate can make a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a successful check, the crew's quality score increases by 1.

Navigate (Quartermaster Only)

The quartermaster can try to prevent the group from becoming lost, making a Wisdom (Survival) check when the DM calls for it. (See "Becoming Lost" in chapter 5 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for more information.)

Noticing Threats

Use the passive Wisdom (Perception) score of the characters or the crew to determine whether anyone on the ship notices a hidden threat. The crew has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score equal to 10 + the crew's quality score. The DM might decide that a threat can be noticed only by characters in a specific area of the ship. For example, only characters below deck might have a chance to hear or spot a creature hiding on board.

Repair (Bosun Only)

The ship's bosun can undertake this activity. At the end of the day, the bosun can make a Strength check using carpenter's tools. On a 15 or higher, each damaged component regains hit points equal to 1d6 + the crew's quality score (minimum of 1 hit point). A component other than the hull that had 0 hit points becomes functional again.

Stealth (Captain Only)

The ship's captain can engage in this activity only if the weather conditions restrict visibility, such as in heavy fog. The ship makes a Dexterity check with a bonus equal to the crew's quality score to determine if it can hide.

Hazards

Hazards come in two basic types: environmental hazards, such as storms or turbulent waters, and other events, such as a fire aboard the ship or a plague outbreak.

Environmental Hazards

Icebergs choke a misty sea. Winds and towering waves threaten to capsize a ship. Snowstorms batter ships that venture north too late in the year. These are all examples of environmental hazards that can last for days and demand a crew's attention.

Each day a ship spends involved in a hazard requires the officers to each make a special ability check, as shown on the Hazard Checks table. This check takes the place of any other activities that the officer might undertake and represents the officer's contribution to keeping the ship afloat.

Hazard Checks

Officer	Check
Captain	Intelligence (water vehicles)
First mate	Charisma (Intimidation)
Bosun	Strength (carpenter's tools)
Quartermaster	Wisdom (Nature)
Surgeon	Intelligence (Medicine)
Cook	Constitution (cook's utensils)

If there is no one available to make a check, treat the result as a 0.

Finally, roll a d20 for the crew, using its quality score as a modifier to the roll. Add up all of these checks and then refer to the Hazard Check Results table. That table shows if the ship has met with disaster or success in surviving that day of the hazard.

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Hazard Check Results

Check Total	Result
140+	**Great Success.** The crew's quality score increases by 1 for 1d4 days.
105–139	**Success.** The ship survives unscathed.
70–104	**Partial Disaster.** Each component takes 4d10 bludgeoning damage. The crew's quality score is reduced by 1. The ship struggles, moving at half speed that day.
0–69	**Disaster.** The ship's components each take 10d10 bludgeoning damage. The crew's quality score drops by 2, as several members of the crew are washed overboard and lost. The ship is blown off course and struggles to recover its bearings, failing to cover any distance that day.

If you want to add variety to hazards, consider including some interesting complications. For example, a whirlpool might drag a ship to the Elemental Plane of Water on a disaster result, with the ship avoiding the vortex on any other result.

You can also add or subtract to the success thresholds in the Hazard Check Results table to reflect a hazard's danger. If you decide to do so, increase or decrease a threshold by 35.

Other Events

In addition to rough seas and daunting weather, a ship might face a number of other threats.

The hazards below serve as examples of what can go wrong on a ship. Each one requires a different officer to spend a day dealing with the hazard instead of engaging in other activity. As a rule of thumb, there is a 10 percent chance each day that one of the following events occurs.

Emergency Maneuvers. The crew must react quickly to avoid a sudden threat. A kraken passes below the ship, threatening to capsize it in its wake, or the ship is about to crash into an uncharted reef. The captain must make a DC 15 Intelligence (water vehicles) check. On a failed check, the ship's hull takes 8d10 bludgeoning damage from the collision. On a successful check, the captain's quick direction keeps the ship out of harm.

Conflict. Life at sea is a mixture of monotony, hard work, and sudden moments of terror. The stress can wear on the stoutest sailor. Sometimes, that stress turns into conflict among the crew. If dissension spreads in the ranks, the first mate's activity that day must be spent making a DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check to control the crew. On a failed check, the crew's quality score decreases by 1d4.

Fire. A fire at sea can render a ship unable to function. Pick a random component. It takes 4d10 fire damage unless the bosun succeeds on a DC 15 Strength (carpenter's tools) check.

Plague. An illness sweeps through the ranks, perhaps caused by rats or insects that made their way aboard. The surgeon must make a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check. On a failed check, the crew's quality score decreases by 5 for 1d6 days.

Infestation. Beetles, rats, or other pests infest the ship, threatening its food stores. The cook must make a DC 15 Constitution (brewer's supplies) check to save what food they can. On a failed check, the crew has disadvantage on any checks involving its quality score until the ship has a chance to restock supplies.

Ships in Combat

This section provides guidance on using ships in combat.

Ships and Initiative

A ship rolls initiative using its Dexterity, and it uses its crew's quality score as a modifier to that roll.

On a ship's turn, the captain decides which of the ship's actions to use.

Special Officer Actions

During an encounter, the captain, first mate, and bosun each have access to two special action options described below: Full Speed Ahead and Fire at Will.

Full Speed Ahead

As an action while on deck, the captain, first mate, or bosun can exhort the crew to work harder and drive a ship forward. Roll a d6 and multiply the result by 5. Apply the total as a bonus to the ship's speed until the end of the ship's next turn. If this bonus is applied to a ship's speed when the ship is already moving faster than normal, use the higher result. Don't add the two bonuses together.

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Fire at Will

As an action, the captain, first mate, or bosun aids the crew in aiming one of the ship's weapons. Select one of the ship's weapons that is within 10 feet of the officer. It gains advantage on the next attack roll it makes before the end of the ship's next turn.

Crashing

If a ship moves into the space occupied by a creature or object, it might crash. A ship avoids crashing if the creature or object is at least two sizes smaller than it.

When a ship crashes, it must immediately make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, it takes damage to its hull based on the size of the creature or object it crashed into, as shown on the Crash Damage table. It also stops moving if the object or creature is bigger than it or one size smaller. Otherwise the ship continues moving and the creature or object moves to the nearest unoccupied space that is not in the ship's path. At the DM's discretion, an object that is forced to move but is fixed in place is instead destroyed.

Crash Damage

Size	Bludgeoning Damage
Small	1d6
Medium	1d10
Large	4d10
Huge	8d10
Gargantuan	16d10

A creature struck must make a Dexterity saving throw with a DC equal to 10 + the ship's Strength modifier, taking damage based on the ship's size (as shown on the Crash Damage table) on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Owning a Ship

If you purchase a ship, you have unlocked an exciting new venue for adventure and signed up for a mountain of logistical challenges. Keeping a ship functioning requires a tremendous amount of work.

The rules use a downtime activity—managing a ship—to abstractly represent the effort needed to keep a ship functioning, its supplies stocked, and its crew paid.

See the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and *Xanathar's Guide to Everything* for more information on downtime activities.

Downtime: Managing a Ship

By hiring a competent captain and crew and putting them to work hauling cargo or otherwise offering their services, you can make it possible for a ship to remain in good repair and even generate a profit for you between adventures.

Managing a ship is a downtime activity that requires time and effort to recruit an officer and crew. The ship is available for use when needed. Otherwise, the ship hauls passengers and cargo to cover the costs of maintaining the ship and paying the crew.

Resources

It takes one week to recruit a crew and 100 + 4d6 gp to cover the costs of recruitment and supplies. Once you have paid these costs, you have a captain and a crew to maintain the ship.

Resolution

Once you have a working ship, it turns a small profit each month. At the end of every four weeks, you earn 5d20 gp.

Complications

A ship owner runs the risk of foul weather, a bad trade deal, or a mutiny. When rolling to determine your profit, if any of the d20 rolls are a 1, roll on the Ship Ownership Complications table (or the DM may create a suitable complication).

Ship Ownership Complications

d6	Complication
1	Your crew makes a bad bargain. You see no profit this month.
2	Your ship and crew have been pressed into military service to hunt pirates for 1d4 months.
3	A temple related to the sea or trade has accused your crew of disrespecting the gods, and no one will do business with your ship and crew. You lose 5d20 gp per month for 1d6 months or until the temple is mollified.
4	Your ship and crew go missing and must be rescued from their captors.
5	Your crew mutinies and is on the run from you.
6	Your crew is caught smuggling illegal goods. They are imprisoned, and your ship impounded.

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Next Issue: Dragon+ 24

Join our stream of consciousness in the next exciting edition of *Dragon+*!

Comic-book fans will be well served when Dragon+ returns for its first issue of the New Year. We'll speak to writer B. Dave Walters to discuss his forthcoming IDW series and get the inside track on his livestream game.

B. Dave Walters

We'll also take a look at new companions and minions, including new "bogeys" as well as options from Extra Life. And there'll be even more from our charitable shenanigans as we chat about the issues that matter to some key donors—including a Dungeon Master Shaman—as we thank them for their generosity. We'll also bring you more fiction, and showcase our latest rounds of quick-fire cartoons. There's all this, plus more exclusive previews, another delve into the imposing Dragon archive, and all our regulars like the selection of the best video and audio highlights, and much, much more! See you on the flip side…

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